



Doctrine of Salvation

Death, the Intermediate State, and Glorification¹

Explanation and Scriptural Basis

- Our treatment of the application of salvation must include a consideration of death, for death is both the necessary penalty for sin and a servant of the Christian's eternal joy because of the victory of Christ in the gospel.
- Death is an important topic to understand, for it comes for all people.
- While death in an abstract sense is not ultimately a fearful thing for Christians, it's the uncertainty regarding the particular, unknown circumstances of our deaths that is often cause for fear.
 - **R.C. Sproul:** "So I don't fear death, but if you ask me about dying, that's another matter. If I could just close my eyes and step across into heaven, that would be glory for me, but none of us knows the route we will take. It may be one that includes great affliction, pain, and suffering. But the travail will be for a moment compared with the other side. Though we may experience the pangs of terror as we consider the prospect of dying, death itself holds no fear for us because it is our entrance to that suite that Jesus has prepared for us in heaven, a suite in the house where He Himself dwells."
- While we generally can't know the nature or timing of our deaths in advance, Scripture sufficiently addresses death such that believers can be prepared and even rejoice at the prospect of what death will bring.
- Some common questions related to death:
 - What is the purpose of death in the Christian life?
 - What happens to our bodies and souls when we die?
 - When will we receive resurrection bodies, and what will they be like?
- **Definition of death:** The state of our soul's separation from our body. Biologically, this means all vital functions have ceased without possibility for revival, and spiritually, it means our spirit no longer dwells within our physical bodies but goes to be either with or away from the Lord.
 - **The First Death:** The first death is the necessary outcome of our sinful rebellion in Adam, a product of the curse.

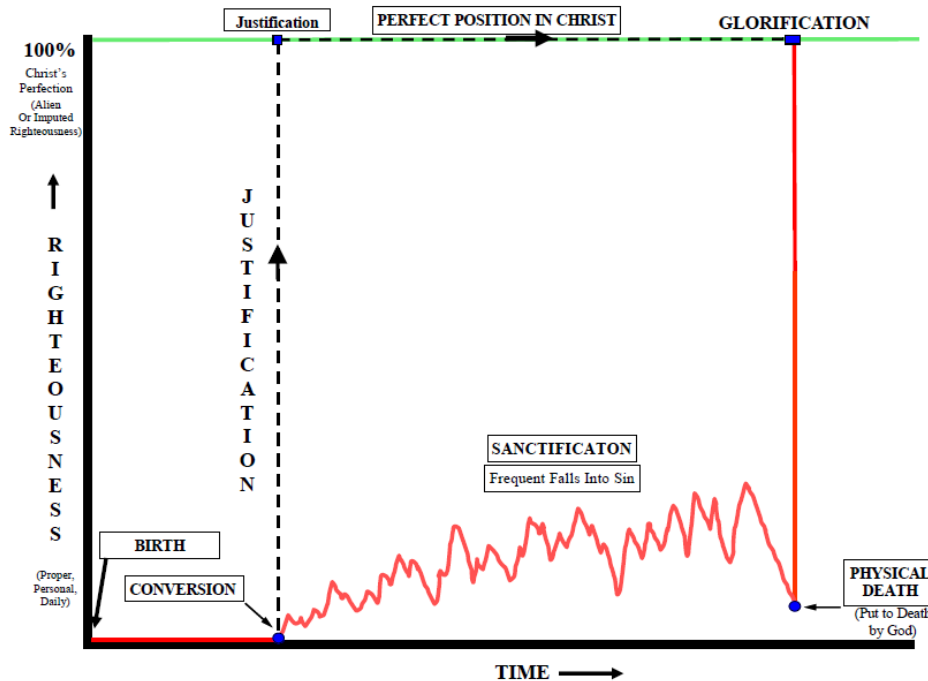
¹ Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999). This lesson outline contains content directly quoted or adapted from chapter 25 of Grudem.

- **Genesis 3:19** *By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*
- **Romans 6:23** *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
- **Hebrews 9:27** *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment...*
- **1 Corinthians 15:21-22** *For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.*
- **The Second Death:** Scripture also speaks of a “second death”, the eternal state of nonbelievers after the second coming of Jesus, where both body and Spirit are cast into Hell:
 - **Revelation 2:11** ¹¹*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’*
 - **Revelation 20:14** *Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.*
- This lends a sense of urgency: One must repent and believe in Jesus before their first death to be spared from the second death.
- While death and hell are significant themes worthy of their own study, for the purpose of this class, we will focus on death as it relates to the Christian and how it fits into the doctrine of salvation.

Why Do Christians Die?

- **Death is not punitive for Christians.**
 - Paul tells us clearly that there is “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).
 - The entire penalty for our sins has been paid.
 - Therefore, even though we know that Christians die, we should not view the death of Christians as a punishment from God or in any way a result of a penalty due to us for our sins.
 - It is true that the penalty for sin is death, but that penalty no longer applies to us—not in terms of physical death, and not in terms of spiritual death or separation from God. All of that has been paid for by Christ.
 - Therefore, there must be another reason than punishment for sins if we understand why Christians die.
 - That is not to suggest that a Christian mired in frequent patterns of sin cannot be disciplined by God with the ultimate discipline of death. (See chart below.)

ULTIMATE DISCIPLINE FOR SIN



- **Death is the final outcome of living in a fallen world.**
 - In his great wisdom, God decided that he would not apply to us the benefits of Christ's redemptive work all at once. Rather, he has chosen to apply the benefits of salvation to us gradually over time.
 - Similarly, he has chosen not to remove all evil from the world immediately, but to wait until the final judgment and the establishment of the new heaven and new earth.
 - In short, we still live in a fallen world and our experience of salvation is still incomplete.
 - The last aspect of the fallen world to be removed will be death.
 - **1 Corinthians 15:26** *Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*
 - When Christ returns, "Then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?'" (1 Corinthians 15:54–55).
 - Until that time death remains a reality even in the lives of Christians.
 - Although death does not come to us as a penalty for our individual sins (for that has been paid by Christ), it does come to us as a result of living in a fallen world, where the effects of sin have not all been removed.

- Related to the experience of death are other results of the fall that harm our physical bodies and signal the presence of death in the world; Christians as well as non-Christians experience aging, illnesses, injuries, and natural disasters—all which are threats to our physical well-being.
- Although God often answers prayers to deliver Christians (and also non-Christians) from some of these effects of the fall for a time (foretastes of His coming kingdom), nevertheless, Christians eventually experience all of these things to some measure, and until Christ returns, all of us will grow old and die. The “last enemy” has not yet been destroyed.
- **God uses the experience of death to complete our sanctification.**
 - Throughout our Christian lives we know that we never have to pay any penalty for sin, for that has all been taken by Christ (Rom 8:1).
 - Therefore, when we do experience pain and suffering in this life, we should never think it is because God is *punishing* us (for our harm or for retribution).
 - Sometimes suffering is simply a result of living in a sinful, fallen world, and sometimes it is because God is *disciplining* us (for our good), but in all cases we are assured by Romans 8:28 that “God causes *all things* to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.”
 - The positive purpose for God’s discipline is clear in Hebrews 12, where we read, “The Lord disciplines him whom he loves. ... He disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:6, 10–11).
 - Not all discipline serves to correct us when we have committed sins; God may allow it to strengthen us so that we may gain greater ability to trust him and to resist sin in the challenging path of obedience (see Hebrews 5:8).
 - We should see all the hardship and suffering that comes to us in life as something that God brings to us *to do us good*, strengthening our trust in him and our obedience, and ultimately increasing our ability to glorify him.
 - The understanding that death is not in any way a punishment for sin, but simply something God brings us through in order to make us more like Christ, should be a great encouragement to us:
 - It should take away the fear that haunts the minds of unbelievers (see Hebrews 2:15).
 - We must still remember that death is not natural or right, and in a world created by God, it is something that ought not to be. It is an enemy—something that Christ will finally destroy (1 Corinthians 15:26).

- **Our obedience to God is more important than preserving our own lives.**
 - If God uses the experience of death to deepen our trust in him and to strengthen our obedience to him, then it is important that we remember that the world's goal of preserving one's own physical life at all costs is not the highest goal for a Christian: *obedience to God and faithfulness to him in every circumstance is far more important*. See Acts 21:13; cf. 25:11; also Acts 20:24 and Philippians 1:20.
 - The persuasion that we may honor the Lord even in our death and that faithfulness to him is far more important than preserving our lives, has given courage and motivation to martyrs throughout the history of the church. See Revelation 12:11.

How Should We Think of Our Own Death and the Death of Others?

- **Our Own Death**
 - The NT encourages us to view our own death, not with fear, but with joy at the prospect of going to be with Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:8).
 - While Paul was in prison, not knowing whether he would be executed or released, he could say: "For to me to live is Christ, and *to die is gain*. If it is to be life in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall chose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. *My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better*" (Philippians 1:21–23).
 - See also Revelation 14:13; Romans 8:38–39.
- **The Death of Christian Friends & Relatives**
 - While we can look forward to our own death with a joyful expectation of being in Christ's presence, our attitude will be somewhat different when we experience the death of Christian friends and relatives.
 - In these cases, we will experience genuine sorrow—but mixed with joy that they have gone to be with the Lord.
 - It is not wrong to express real sorrow at the loss of fellowship with loved ones who have died, and sorrow also for the suffering and hardship that they may have gone through prior to death.
 - **Note:** Sometimes Christians think it shows lack of faith if they mourn deeply for a brother or sister Christian who has died. But Scripture does not support this view. See Acts 8:2, for example; also John 11:35.
 - But, the sorrow that we feel over the death of loved ones is clearly mingled with hope and joy.
 - Paul does not tell the Thessalonians that they should not grieve *at all* concerning their loved ones who have died, but he writes, "that you may not grieve *as others do* who have no hope" (1 Thess 4:13)—they should not grieve in the same way, with the same bitter despair, that unbelievers have.

- He assures them that Christ “died for us so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with him” (1 Thessalonians 5:10), and thereby encourages them that those who have died have gone to be with the Lord. See Revelation 14:13; Psalm 116:15.
- Though we mourn, our mourning should be mixed with worship of God and thanksgiving for the life of the loved one who has died.
- **The Death of Unbelievers**
 - When unbelievers die, the sorrow we feel is not mingled with the joy of assurance that they have gone to be with the Lord forever. This sorrow, especially regarding those to whom we have been close, is very deep and real. (See and consider Rom 9:1–3.)

What Happens When People Die? (The Intermediate State)

- ***The souls of believers go immediately into God’s presence.***
 - Death is a temporary cessation of bodily life and a separation of the soul from the body. Once a believer has died, though his physical body remains on earth and is buried, at the moment of death his soul (or spirit) goes immediately into the presence of God with rejoicing.
 - **2 Corinthians 5:8** *Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*
 - **Philippians 1:23** *I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.*
 - **Luke 23:43** *And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”*
 - **Hebrews 12:23** *...and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect...*
 - However, as we shall see in a moment, God does not leave our dead bodies in the earth forever, for when Christ returns, the souls of believers will be reunited with their bodies, their bodies will be raised from the dead, and they will live with Christ eternally.
- ***The souls of unbelievers go immediately to eternal punishment.***
 - Scripture never encourages us to think that people will have a second chance to trust in Christ after death.
 - In fact, the situation is quite the contrary. See Luke 16:24–26, The Rich Man and Lazarus.
 - The book of Hebrews connects death with the consequence of judgment in close sequence: “Just as it is appointed for me to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).

- Moreover, Scripture never presents the final judgment as depending on anything done after we die, but only on what has happened in this life (see Matthew 25:31–46; Romans 2:5–10).
 - Although unbelievers pass into a state of eternal punishment immediately upon death, their bodies will not be raised until the day of final judgment. On that day, their bodies will be raised and reunited with their souls, and they will stand before God’s throne for final judgment to be pronounced upon them in the body (see John 5:28–29; Acts 24:15; and Revelation 20:12, 15).
- ***The Bible does not teach the doctrine of purgatory.***
 - The fact that the souls of believers go immediately into God’s presence means that *there is no such thing as purgatory*.
 - In Roman Catholic teaching, purgatory is the place where the souls of believers go to be further purified from sin until they are ready to be admitted into heaven.
 - According to this view, the sufferings of purgatory are given to God in substitute for the punishment for sins that believers should have received in time, but did not.
 - Not only does this require that Jesus’s payment for sin was insufficient, but it’s contrary to the verses above.
- ***The Bible does not teach the doctrine of “soul sleep.”***
 - The fact that souls of believers go immediately into God’s presence also means that *the doctrine of soul sleep is incorrect*.
 - This doctrine teaches that when believers die they go into a state of unconscious existence, and the next thing that they are conscious of will be when Christ returns and raises them to life.
 - This doctrine has never found wide acceptance in the church. Jesus did not say to the thief on the cross, “Today you will no longer have consciousness of anything that is going on,” but, “Today *you will be with me in Paradise*” (Luk3 23:43). There’s a personal, relational aspect that requires cognizance and awareness.

What is Glorification?

- God will not leave our dead bodies in the earth forever. When Christ redeems us, he did not redeem just our spirits (or souls)—he redeemed us as whole persons, and this includes the redemption of our bodies.
- Therefore, the application of Christ’s work of redemption will not be complete until our bodies are entirely set free from the effects of the fall and brought to that state of perfection for which God created them. In fact, the redemption of our bodies will only occur when Christ returns and raises our bodies from the dead.
 - At this present time, Paul says that we wait for “the redemption of our bodies,” and then adds, “for in this hope we were saved” (Romans 8:23–24).

- **Definition of glorification:** *Glorification is the final step in the application of redemption. It will happen when Christ returns and raises from the dead the bodies of all believers for all time who have died, reunites them with their souls, changes the bodies of all believers who remain alive, and gives all believers at the same time perfect resurrection bodies like his own.*
- Biblical evidence for glorification:
 - The primary NT passage on glorification or the resurrection body is 1 Corinthians 15:12–58:
 - Paul says, “So also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then *at his coming* those who belong to Christ” (vv 22–23).
 - “Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but *we shall all be changed*, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor 15:51–52).
 - Paul further explains in 1 Thessalonians that the souls of those who have died and gone to be with Christ will come back and be joined with their bodies on that day, for Christ will bring them with him. See 1 Thess 4:14, 16–17.
- **What will our resurrection bodies be like?**
 - If Christ will raise our bodies from the dead when he returns, and if our bodies will be like his resurrection body (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23, 39; Philippians 3:21), then what will our resurrection bodies be like?
 - **Imperishable.** In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul states that our resurrection bodies will be “imperishable.” This means that they will not wear out or grow old or ever be subject to any kind of sickness or disease. Our resurrection bodies will show the fulfillment of God’s perfect wisdom in creating us as human beings who are the pinnacle of his creation and the appropriate bearers of his likeness and image. In these resurrection bodies, we will clearly see humanity as God intended it to be.
 - **Glorious.** Paul also says our bodies will be raised “in glory.” When this term is contrasted with “dishonor,” as it is here, there is a suggestion of the beauty or the attractiveness of appearance our bodies will have. Cf. Daniel 12:3; Matthew 13:43.
 - **Powerful.** Our bodies will also be raised “in power” (1 Corinthians 15:43). This is in contrast to the “weakness” we see in our bodies now. Our resurrection bodies will not only be free from disease and aging, they will also be given fullness of strength and power—not infinite power like God, of course, and probably not what we would think of as “superhuman” power in the sense possessed by superheroes in modern fictional stories, but nonetheless the full and complete human power and strength, the strength that God intended human beings to have in their bodies when he created them. It will therefore be strength that is sufficient to do all that we desire to do in conformity with the will of God.

- **Spiritual.** Paul says that the body is raised a “spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:44). Such a body is not at all “nonphysical,” but it is a physical body raised to the degree of perfection for which God intended it.
- When Christ returns, he will give us new resurrection bodies to be like his resurrection body. “When he appears we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2).
 - Such assurance provides a clear affirmation of the goodness of God’s physical creation.
 - We will live as resurrected believers in those new bodies, and they will be suitable for inhabiting the “new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 2:13).

Questions for Application

- Have you thought very much about the possibility of your own death? Has there been an element of fear connected with those thoughts? What, if anything, do you fear about death, and where do these fears come from? How would the teachings of Scripture encourage you to deal with these fears?
- Do you think you would have the courage to refuse to sin even if it meant being thrown to the lions in a Roman coliseum, or burned at the stake during the Reformation, or thrown in prison for years in some foreign country today? What happened to Christian martyrs in history to equip them for this suffering (read 1 Cor 10:13)? Have you settled in your own mind that obedience to Christ is more important than preserving your own life? What would make you hesitant to believe this or act on this conviction?