

PREPARE TO DIE!

Death and What Comes After

Lesson 1

In our world there is no topic that puts a damper on conversation like death. You can talk about drugs, immorality, politics, or just about anything else, but bring up the topic of death and instantly people change the subject or remember they have something they need to be doing. Why is this? Because death scares people. The world with its evolutionary perspective teaches that once you die, it's all over. You cease to be. There is no heaven or hell, you are just gone. Yet God has put eternity in the hearts of men, a knowledge of Himself, and deep down all men know that God exists. This innate knowledge of God creates a tension within people between what they hope or think is true and the reality of God within them.

When forced to think of death most unbelievers think they deserve to go to heaven. When a godless relative dies they console themselves by saying things like, "They will be happier in heaven," or "They are in a better place now." And when you ask them about dying they instantly compare themselves with others who are worse and rationalize to themselves that they aren't all that bad and if heaven exists surely they will go there.

This kind of thought and behavior is understandable among unbelievers, but what about Christians? Many Christians have the same or even worse thoughts about death. They fear dying. They fear hell. They fear standing before Christ. Unlike unbelievers, they know they don't deserve to go to heaven. They realize they are great sinners who deserve hell.

The only cure to feelings and responses like these is the truth. And that is why we are teaching this class. Our goal is to teach you from the Scriptures about death, dying, and what happens after that. We want you to be ready to die at any moment without being fearful of something all must go through. So – "Prepare to die!"

"When I am gone, speak less of Dr. Carey and more of Dr. Carey's Savior."
William Carey

"Children, when I am gone, sing a song of praise to God."
Susanna Wesley

"I know I am dying, but my death-bed is a bed of roses. I have no thorns planted upon my dying pillow. Heaven is already begun!"
John Pawson, minister

"I am not tired of my work, neither am I tired of the world; yet when Christ calls me home, I shall go with the gladness of a boy bounding away from school."
Adoniram Judson

"There is one single fact which we may oppose to all the wit and argument of infidelity, namely, that no man ever repented of being a Christian on his death bed."
Hannah More

I. **DEATH DEFINED**

- A. Viewed theologically, death refers to the destructive consequences of the entrance of sin into humankind. This consequence is spiritual alienation or separation from God. As a result of sin humans also experience physical death, a visible and universal reminder of the ongoing effects of sin. Scripture also points to a “second death” (Rev 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8): the final separation of the wicked from God’s glorious presence for all eternity.¹
- B. Death – a term that, when applied to the lower orders of living things such as plants and animals, means the end of life. With reference to human beings, however, death is not the end of life. The Bible teaches that we are more than physical creatures; we are also spiritual beings. For man, therefore, physical death does not mean the end of existence but the end of life as we know it and the transition to another dimension in which our conscious existence continues.²
- C. **Physical death**
1. The Bible teaches that all humans will die (Heb 9:27). The only exceptions will be those who are still alive when Christ returns (1 Thes 4:17). Physical death, or the “first death,” is the separation of the soul from the body. Because of the presence of sin in the world, everyone must die (Rom 5:12).³
 2. Physical death generally denotes the irreversible cessation of bodily functions (2 Sam. 14:14; Rom. 6:23; Heb. 9:27) but occasionally the gradual weakening of physical powers (2 Cor. 4:12, 16).⁴
- D. **Spiritual death**
1. Sometimes the NT emphasizes the serious consequence of sin by referring to ‘the second death’ (Jude 12; Rev. 2:11, etc.). This is a rabbinic expression for eternal perdition. It is to be understood along with passages in which Jesus spoke of ‘eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’ (Mt. 25:41), ‘eternal punishment’ (set in contrast to ‘eternal life’, Mt. 25:46), and the like. The final state of the impenitent is variously described as death, punishment, being lost, etc. Obviously it would be

¹Stanley J. Grenz, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*, under “death,” Intersity Press.

²Ronald F. Youngblood, *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, under “death,” Thomas Nelson.

³Walter A. Elwell, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, under “Eschatology, death,” Tyndale House.

⁴Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The New Dictionary of Theology*, under “death,” Intersity Press.

unwise to equate it with any one description. But clearly it is a state to be regarded with horror.⁵

2. Spiritual death describes man's natural alienation from God, his lack of responsiveness to God, or his hostility to God, because of sin (Gn. 2:17; Mt. 8:22; Jn. 5:24–25; 8:21, 24; Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:1; Jas. 5:20; Jude 12; Rev. 3:1).⁶

II. YOUR LIFE IS SHORT AND YOUR DEATH IS INEVITABLE

- A. **Psa. 39:5** Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths, And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight; Surely every man at his best is a mere breath. Selah.
- B. **Psa. 144:4** Man is like a mere breath; His days are like a passing shadow.
- C. **James 1:11** For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.
- D. **Jam. 4:13-14** Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." 14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.
- E. **Heb. 9:27** And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.
 1. Since life is short and death inevitable, why do people fear death so much?
 2. What is the practical application Christians can derive from knowing life is short and death is inevitable?

III. KNOW WHERE YOU ARE GOING AFTER YOU DIE

A. Know Who You Are

1. **Gen. 6:5** Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.
2. **Rom. 3:10-18, 23** as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; 11 There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; 12 All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even

⁵N. Hillyer, *The New Bible Dictionary, Third Edition*, under "death, II Spiritual death," Tyndale House.

⁶Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The New Dictionary of Theology*, under "death," Intervarsity Press.

one.” 13 “Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving,” “The poison of asps is under their lips”; 14 “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness”; 15 “Their feet are swift to shed blood, 16 Destruction and misery are in their paths, 17 And the path of peace they have not known.” 18 “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” . . . 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

B. Know who God is

1. God is holy and just

- a. **Ezek. 18:4** “Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.
- b. **Rom. 1:17** For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “But the righteous man shall live by faith.”

2. God is loving and merciful

- a. **Jn. 3:16** “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.
- b. **I Jn. 4:10** In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

C. Know who Christ is

- 1. **John 14:6** Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.
- 2. **Acts 4:10-12** let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health. 11 “He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone. 12 “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

D. Know what Christ did

- 1. **Isa. 53:1-12** Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 2 For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. 3 He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. 6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. 7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a

sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due? 9 His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. 10 But the Lord was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. 11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

2. **Rom. 5:6-8** For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

E. **Believe the Gospel**

1. **Rom. 10:9-10** that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.
2. **I Cor. 15:1-4** Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,
3. Can someone actually know for certain that they are going to heaven? If so how?
4. Let's say a longtime Christian friend asked you out to lunch. A person that attended church regularly, read their Bible faithfully, served and seemed to be a grounded Christian. At lunch they confided in you and said they were fearful of going to hell. They explained that they knew the gospel front-wards and back but had fears that the knowledge they had was merely head knowledge and not true saving faith. They explained that every time they read the Bible, attended a Bible study, or heard a sermon they felt guilty. They looked at their life and all they saw was their sin, their unworthiness and their repeated rebellion against God. All these things made them fearful of dying. What advice would you give them?

IV. **YOU ARE DEAD – NOW WHAT?**

A. **Your Spirit Goes to Be with the Lord (Intermediate State)**

1. **Job 19:25-27** “As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, And at the last He will take His stand on the earth. 26 “Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God; 27 Whom I myself shall behold, And whom my eyes will see and not another. My heart faints within me!

2. **II Cor. 5:6-9** Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord— 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight— 8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. 9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

3. **Phil. 1:21-24** For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. 23 But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; 24 yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.
 - a. What do you think it will be like in heaven before you get your glorified body?
 - b. What do you think it will be like to stand before Jesus immediately after you die?
 - c. What do you think it will be like being with the angels?

B. Your Body Rots in the Grave and Returns to Dust

1. **Gen. 3:17-19** Then to Adam He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat from it’; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life. 18 “Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; 19 By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return.”

2. **Eccl. 12:6-7** Remember Him before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; 7 then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.
 - a. What are we after we die?
 - b. What application can we make from these verses about preparing to die?

C. At the Resurrection Your Body Is Glorified and United with Your Spirit

1. **I Cor. 15:51-52** Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52 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 will be changed.

2. **I Thess. 4:13-18** But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.
 - a. What do you think it will be like to have a glorified body?

 - b. What do you think will happen when we are raptured:
 - (1) to our clothes?

 - (2) to our appearance?

 - (3) to our mended bodies?

 - (4) to those left behind?

V. HEAVEN, THE MILLENNIUM, AND THE ETERNAL STATE

- A. **Dan. 12:2-3** “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. 3 “Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

- B. **Rom. 8:18** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

- C. **Col. 3:4** When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

- D. **Jude 24** Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy,

E. **Rev. 3:21** 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. . . ; 20:6 Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. . . ; 22:5 And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.

1. In the verses above, what is there to be afraid of?
2. Why don't we think of these things more often?

Doubting one! thou hast often said, "I fear I shall never enter heaven." Fear not! all the people of God shall enter there. I love the quaint saying of a dying man, who exclaimed, "I have no fear of going home; I have sent all before me; God's finger is on the latch of my door, and I am ready for him to enter." "But," said one, "are you not afraid lest you should miss your inheritance?" "Nay," said he, "nay; there is one crown in heaven which the angel Gabriel could not wear, it will fit no head but mine. There is one throne in heaven which Paul the apostle could not fill; it was made for me, and I shall have it." O Christian, what a joyous thought! thy portion is secure; "there remaineth a rest." "But cannot I forfeit it?" No, it is entailed. If I be a child of God I shall not lose it. It is mine as securely as if I were there. Come with me, believer, and let us sit upon the top of Nebo, and view the goodly land, even Canaan. Seest thou that little river of death glistening in the sunlight, and across it dost thou see the pinnacles of the eternal city? Dost thou mark the pleasant country, and all its joyous inhabitants? Know, then, that if thou couldst fly across thou wouldst see written upon one of its many mansions, "This remaineth for such a one; preserved for him only. He shall be caught up to dwell for ever with God." Poor doubting one, see the fair inheritance; it is thine. If thou believest in the Lord Jesus, if thou hast repented of sin, if thou hast been renewed in heart, thou art one of the Lord's people, and there is a place reserved for thee, a crown laid up for thee, a harp specially provided for thee. No one else shall have thy portion, it is reserved in heaven for thee, and thou shalt have it ere long, for there shall be no vacant thrones in glory when all the chosen are gathered in.⁷

⁷Charles Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*, Morning January 10th, II Tim. 4:8.