

After Death

Luke 16:19-31

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7/30/2020

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What different ideas do people have about what happens after death?

- everyone “sleeps” until the final judgment, after which everyone will be sent to heaven or hell
- at the moment of death, people are instantly judged and sent to their eternal destinations
- when people die, their souls/spirits are sent to a “temporary” heaven or hell, to await the final resurrection, the final judgment, and then the finality of their eternal destination

What do the following Bible verses tell us about what happens after death?

John 3:36 – He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

For the believer in Jesus Christ, the Bible tells us that after death believers’ souls/spirits are taken to heaven, because their sins are forgiven by having received Christ as Savior. Unbelievers will not be taken to heaven but will go to a place where they experience God’s wrath.

Philippians 1:21-23 – For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

Paul knew that continuing in his mortal bodies meant that he could fulfill the purpose the Lord had for him but that his departing from his mortal body meant being with the Lord. And being with the Lord would be much better than the trials and tribulation of this fallen world.

2 Corinthians 5:6-8 – So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

While believers are in our mortal bodies, we are absent from the physical presence of Jesus. When our souls & spirits are separated from our mortal bodies, we will be present with the Lord.

What does this verse have to say about soul sleep?

Soul sleep is erroneous doctrine. The body sleeps (a euphemism for death), the soul doesn’t.

What does it mean we walk by faith and not by sight?

Even though we don’t have the physical presence of Jesus, we act like we know He lives and trust in His promises.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 – I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep 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 by no means precede those who are asleep.

¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

There will be a mass resurrection event for all believers in Christ (the rapture of the church). All the church living and dead will receive their permanent, glorified bodies at essentially the same time.

1 Corinthians 15:51-54 – Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall 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 incorruptible, and we shall be changed.⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.⁵⁴ So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

Our receiving permanent, glorified bodies will be sudden and instantaneous. Those living will be transformed from mortal to immortal bodies.

If believers go to be with Christ immediately after death, what is the purpose of our resurrection?

It seems that while the souls and spirits of believers go to be with Christ immediately after death, the physical body remains in the grave “sleeping.” At the resurrection of believers, the physical body is resurrected, glorified, and instantly reunited with the soul and spirit. Our reunited and glorified body-soul-spirits will be the condition of believers for eternity in the new heavens and new earth.

So, does that mean people are in a state of dis-embodied spirits between the death of their mortal bodies and the resurrection?

No, consider Luke 16...

Luke 16:19-31

¹⁹ “There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. ²⁰ But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, ²¹ desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

²⁴ “Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ ²⁵ But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.’

²⁷ “Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, ²⁸ for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ ²⁹ Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ ³⁰ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’ ”

What does this passage tell us about what things will be like after death?

- Those who live by faith in God for eternal life go to Abraham’s bosom, aka paradise awaiting their permanent, glorified bodies.

Luke 23:43 – Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

- Those who reject God’s provision for salvation go to torments in Hades awaiting the final, Great White Throne judgment and eternity in the lake of fire. Some who are there with a salvation-by-works perspective will no-doubt think they are in Purgatory working off their sin.
- There is a great gulf between torments and paradise.

Why do you think paradise is called Abraham’s bosom?

This was where those faithful to God went prior to the cross. Abraham was the father of all faithful to God from Israel. No-doubt others faithful to God prior to Abraham was there as well but Abraham was the most important patriarch for Israel.

Do those who die have bodies?

Yes...

*he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off
send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water
and cool my tongue*

- So, the rich man had eyes to lift and a tongue that needed to be cooled
- Lazarus at least had a finger that implies he had a body to go with it.

How can those who die have bodies if our souls and spirits are separated from our bodies at death?

- We have what has been described as temporary spirit-bodies. Just as angels who are spirit-beings appear as having physical bodies, we too will have some sort of bodies.
- One aspect of being in the image of God is that people are a triunity... we are body, soul, & spirit; we will always be body, soul, & spirit...

1 Thess 5:23 – *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

While many often use the term soul and spirit interchangeably, the Bible make a distinction...

Hebrews 4:12 – *For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

How does the Bible help us distinguish the division of the soul and spirit?

The Bible reveals what is of God and what is of sinful men. Our soul has a sin nature, a natural human tendency to be selfish. Our born-again human spirit is in communion with the Holy Spirit who is God. Thus, if our thoughts are

selfish, it is of our soul, if our thoughts are godly, it is of our spirit.

- There will be rewords for training our souls to conform to our spirits...

Romans 12:2 – do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God

How do you reconcile this story about those faithful to God going to paradise versus absent from the body, present with the Lord?

Paradise was before the cross. Jesus visited paradise to declare victory of death...

1 Peter 4:6 – the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

The following passage gives the timing of this preaching victory to the dead...

Ephesians 4:8-10 – When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.” (Now this, “He ascended”—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

I take it that since those who die trusting in Jesus for their salvation go to be with Him that it is likely Jesus took with him the Old Testament saints to heaven... hence the 24 elders of Revelation representing both the Old & New Testament saints.

What does Luke 16 tell us about what happens to unbelievers after death?

For those who do not receive Jesus Christ as Savior, death means everlasting punishment. However, similar to the destiny of believers before the cross, unbelievers are sent immediately to a temporary holding place, to await their final resurrection, judgment, and eternal destiny.

What is the permanent fate of unbelievers?

Revelation 20:11-15 describes all the unbelieving dead being resurrected, judged at the great white throne, and then being cast into the lake of fire.

Is the temporary place for unbelievers any better than the Lake of Fire?

Even though unbelievers are not instantly sent to the lake of fire, their immediate fate after death is not a pleasant one. The rich man cried out, “*I am in agony in this fire*” (Luke 16:24).

So, how do we summarize what happens to people after death today?

- The souls and born-from-above spirits of believers are separated from their mortal bodies and given a temporary spirit-body to be with Jesus in heaven. And there they await the First Resurrection (Revelation 20:6) at the rapture of the church when their temporary spirit-bodies are transformed into permanent glorified bodies.
- The souls and un-regenerated spirits of believers are separated from their mortal bodies and given a temporary spirit-body to be in the “torments” component of hades, the place of the dead. And there they await the Second Resurrection (resurrection of condemnation, John 5:28-29) at the Great white Throne Judgment (revelation 20:13) when their temporary spirit-bodies are transformed into permanent glorified bodies.