

**OF THE STATE AFTER DEATH
(SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2016)**

SCRIPTURE: GEN. 3:14-19; 2 COR. 5:1-10

INTRODUCTION

We are very familiar with both life and death and yet it is amazing to think about life and death.

Scientists in all their wisdom and understanding have never been able to generate life.

Scientists who reject the truth of Scripture also have no way of explaining the origin of life.

And with this we consider how amazingly complex is just a single cell.

The human body consists of some 60 trillion cells that in God's amazing wisdom work together.

And then suddenly it can all end in death.

Our focus today is on death and what happens after death.

As we did last week, we will consider some of the points of the Confession from Chapter 32. Second, we will give attention to another passage from Corinthians. Last week we looked at 1 Cor. 5. Today we will focus on 2 Cor. 5.

May we long not simply for death but for the resurrection and full redemption of our bodies.

1. OF THE STATE AFTER DEATH

There is good money to be made if you can write a book about dying and coming back to life.

Recently there was a book entitled, *The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven*.

In 2004, Alex Malarkey, then six years old, was involved in a horrific car accident, leaving him paralyzed and very close to death.

After he survived this terrible accident and two months in a coma, he told a story of being in heaven.

Later Alex wrote a letter with a very honest confession and a rebuke.

I did not die. I did not go to Heaven.

I said I went to heaven because I thought it would get me attention. When I made the claims that I did, I had never read the Bible. People have profited from lies, and continue to. They should read the Bible, which is enough. The Bible is the only source of truth. Anything written by man cannot be infallible.

It is only through repentance of your sins and a belief in Jesus as the Son of God, who died for your sins (even though he committed none of his own) so that you can be forgiven may you learn of Heaven outside of what is written in the Bible...not by reading a work of man. I want the whole world to know that the Bible is sufficient. Those who market these materials must be called to repent and hold the Bible as enough.¹

Wow!

Sadly, this book and others like it have sold millions of copies.

John MacArthur writes about the absolute deception found in these works.

For anyone who truly believes the biblical record, it is impossible to resist the conclusion that these modern testimonies—with their relentless self-focus and the relatively scant attention they pay to the glory of God—*are simply untrue*. They are either figments of the human imagination (dreams, hallucinations, false memories, fantasies, and in the worst cases, deliberate lies), or else they are products of demonic deception.

We know this with absolute certainty, because Scripture definitively says that people do not go to heaven and come back: "Who has ascended to heaven and come down?" ([Proverbs 30:4](#)). Answer: "No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man" ([John 3:13](#), emphasis added). All the accounts of heaven in Scripture are visions, not journeys taken by dead people.

¹ <http://pulpitandpen.org/2015/01/13/the-boy-who-came-back-from-heaven-recants-story-rebukes-christian-retailers/>

And even visions of heaven are very, very rare in Scripture. You can count them all on one hand.²

You don't need the supposed accounts of children or adults.

We need our focus to be on God's Word.

What Scripture teaches about death is quite simple but still amazing to consider.

At death there is an incredible separation of the soul and the body.

Now in some pagan philosophies this separation is the ultimate goal of life – escape from the physical, prison of the body.

This is not what Scripture teaches.

The separation of the soul and the body is temporary.

Our greatest longing is not simply for death but for the resurrection and glorification of our bodies.

Let me summarize in **four points** what Scripture teaches about death and the body.

First, at death our physical bodies remain on earth and will decay to dust.

We read Gen. 3:19 earlier.

Gen. 3:19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread

Till you return to the ground,

For out of it you were taken;

For dust you *are*,

And to dust you shall return.”

Listen also to Ecc. 12:7

Ecc. 12:7 Then the dust will return to the earth as it was,

And the spirit will return to God who gave it.

² <http://www.gtycanada.org/blog/B121018/the-burpomalarkey-doctrine>

Second, our souls or spirits do not sleep.

Death is sometimes called sleep, but this doesn't mean the soul sleeps.

The souls of the righteous at death are made perfect in holiness and are received into the highest heavens.

To the thief on the cross Jesus said:

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

Paul in Phil. 1:23 stated something very similar:

Phil. 1:23 For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

The language of the Confession on this point is beautiful.

the souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, **where they behold the face of God, in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies.**

The souls of the wicked, those who rejected the only way of salvation found in Jesus Christ, also do not sleep.

The souls of the wicked at death are cast into hell where they remain in torment and utter darkness, waiting for the day of judgment.

Jude 6 And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; **7** as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

Third, there will be people living at the day of our Lord's glorious return.

Those living on the last day will not die, but their bodies will be changed.

1Cor. 15:51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—

1Th. 4:17 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.

Fourth, on the last day at our Lord's return, the most amazing thing will take place – the bodies and souls of all who have lived will be brought together again.

This is the great day of resurrection.

Acts 24:15 I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.

John 5:28 Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice **29** and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

Let me review these four points.

First, at death our physical bodies remain on earth and will decay to dust.

Second, our souls or spirits do not sleep. The souls of believers go to be with God. The souls of unbelievers go to a place of judgment.

Third, there will be people living at the day of our Lord's glorious return.

Fourth, on the day of resurrection, the bodies and souls of all who have lived will be brought together again.

May we long not simply for death but for the resurrection and full redemption of our bodies.

2. LONGING FOR THE RESURRECTION – 2 COR. 5:1-10

1. Our bodies are like tents.

When Paul did his mission work he often supported himself by working as a leather worker or tentmaker.

In Acts 18:3 we are introduced to Aquila and Priscilla who also were tentmakers.

So it is not a surprise to see Paul speak of our earthly body as a tent.

Another commentator suggests the background of this imagery comes from the tents or booths that were used by Jews to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.³

During that feast, temporary structures were built as part of the remembrance of the booths the children of Israel lived in after the Exodus.

Whatever the exact background, the metaphor of a tent to describe your earthly body is very fitting. Tents, generally speaking, are not structures designed to last very long. They can easily be taken down or destroyed.

Paul lived close to death throughout his mission work – whether coming from sickness and disease or the hands of men.

I don't know the average life expectancy of men at that time, but I am guessing it was significantly less than it is today.

Paul even more because of his bold work and calling lived close to death.

In Acts 18 we read of a vision Paul received one evening during his ministry in Corinth. The Lord in this vision encouraged Paul to not be afraid, but to speak and not remain silent, for the Lord promised protection for Paul during his work there.

Paul faced great danger and often the threat of death, and yet Paul lived with the hope that the passing of his earthly life was not the end.

Rather we know with assurance that we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Paul here is speaking of your resurrection body, which you will not receive immediately after death, **but only at the final return of Christ and the resurrection of all the dead.**⁴

This interpretation is confirmed by looking at the great chapter of the resurrection 1 Corinthians 15.

³ Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 40 of Word Biblical Commentary. Accordance/Thomas Nelson electronic ed. (Waco: Word Books, 1986), 102.

⁴ See both Martin and Colin G. Kruse, *2 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 8 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 113.

1Cor. 15:20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. **21** For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. **22** For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. **23** But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming. **24** Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. **25** For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. **26** The last enemy *that* will be destroyed *is* death.

This is the great hope of this chapter based on the resurrection of Christ and confirmed by the present work of the Holy Spirit.

2. You are to strongly desire to be clothed with this new body.

In verses 2 and 4, Paul uses the verb groan.

In our earthly bodies, we groan because we have a strong desire to be clothed with our resurrection bodies, our habitation from heaven.

In verse 4, Paul also speaks of groaning while we are still in our earthly tents.

Paul used the same verb, to groan, in his letter to the Romans.

Rom. 8:23 Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, **even we ourselves groan within ourselves**, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

It is important to note that Paul is not speaking of complaining about the difficulties of life.

We are to groan not motivated by mere complaint but because we long to experience the fullness of God's work of salvation.

We groan even through the help of the Holy Spirit.⁵

The testimony of Paul is written for your instruction.

This is to be your testimony also,

⁵ Martin, 104.

We do not simply desire to escape from the troubles of life.

Your greatest desire should be to be clothed in your resurrection body.

You are to desire not simply the escape from your physical body, that is to be unclothed, rather you are to desire a new, glorified body.

We should also observe here Paul's brief commentary about what happens to a believer after death and before the resurrection.

Death is the temporary separation of the body and the soul.

Paul speaks in verses 3 and 4 about being naked and unclothed.

Most likely he is referring to that temporary state between the death of a believer and the final resurrection.

Now we know that death cannot separate a believer from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

Further we can say that for a believer, death ushers that one into the presence of God as we see in verse 8.

But death is not the end or the final goal of the Christian.

The resurrection is the goal.

Paul's desire, it is thought, was to even live to the day of the return of Christ and the final resurrection.

This is perhaps the thought of verse 4, of being further clothed, which means to put on a garment over an already existing garment.⁶

The point again is that you are not simply to wish for death, but you are to long for your resurrection body.

3. The Holy Spirit is given to you as a guarantee of what God is going to do.

Look at verse 5 again. **Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.**

⁶ BDAG, s.v. "ἐπενδύομαι," 361.

Paul speaks of two great truths in this verse.

God has prepared us for the resurrection.

What does that mean?

John Calvin comments that it is God who has given us this understanding and longing for the future. This is not a natural desire in anyway.⁷

That is a very possible interpretation.

In a slightly different way, Paul might be speaking of the fact that we were created to be eventually redeemed and given glorified bodies.

This has been part of God's plan from the very beginning. This is another reason why it should be a constant longing for the Christian.

And to confirm that this is God's glorious plan, God has given to each believer the Holy Spirit as a guarantee or down payment of what God will do in the future.

Here again is a testimony to the fact that Christ's resurrection should be something we consider far more than just once a year.

How can we live a single day without considering the present work of the Holy Spirit as the guarantee of what God is going to do?

Imagine if Bill Gates promised that you instead of Warren Buffet were going to receive his estate and he sent you a billion dollars to keep you happy until this happened.

I can't think you would only consider your inheritance only occasionally or once a year.

I think part of the problem is that we don't appreciate the Holy Spirit's work and ministry as we should.

Anything that is spiritually good in the life of a believer is the fruit of the Holy Spirit's work, any confidence that you are a child of God is also the work of the Holy Spirit.

When you see the desire to truly serve God through trial and adversity, when you come to God with bold and fervent prayers, this is the work of the Holy Spirit.

When your longing is for the resurrection, this also is through the work of the Holy Spirit.

⁷ John Calvin, *Commentary on 2 Corinthians*, s.v. 2 Corinthians 5:4.

What is the fruit of the Spirit in a believer's life?

Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

And if the Spirit's work is the down payment, think of how incredible the fullness of our inheritance will be.

Paul later wrote in Ephesians 1:14, [the Holy Spirit] is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

4. We live life now absent from the Lord and yet this does not mean despair.

Two times in verses 6 and 8, Paul speaks of being confident.

This word could also be translated as courageous.

Though Paul strongly desires to be clothed with his resurrection body, what does this mean for his life now?

Though Paul knows that to be home in our earthly bodies is to be absent from the Lord, still he states, we are always confident or courageous.

It might seem that in NKJV version, that the knowing of verse 6 is the reason for his confidence, but that is not the best understanding and probably not the best translation.

Paul is confident even though he knows that to be at home in the body is to be absent from the Lord.

The reason for this courage of confidence is found in verse 7.

For we walk by faith, not by sight.

Our fellowship with God is not based on the fact that we can physically see and observe Him.

Our hope for the future is also not simply based on what we can see through our physical eyes.

No, we live a life of faith.

Faith is not simply believing what cannot be seen. Faith is not believing the unbelievable or that which cannot be proven by so-called science.⁸

Rather to live by faith is to live according to the promises of God and His Word.

And in this life of faith there is still rich and true fellowship with God even though you will not enjoy the fullness of that fellowship until you reach the eternal state.

In verse 8 Paul helps us understand another important truth.

He speaks of being absent from the body and being present with the Lord. **And here Paul speaks of the state of the believer between death and the resurrection.**

This is not a period of soul-sleep or non-existence.

No, it is part of the great blessing that has been promised to us even though before the resurrection it is not the fullness of that blessing.

Paul later in Philippians 1:21 in a similar way expressed, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

So even though Paul was focused on the resurrection and did not want to be unclothed, **he did recognize that to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord is still a blessed state.**

5. While God gives you life, you must aim to be well pleasing to Christ.

There is such beauty in God’s Word as it gives instruction on both living and dying.

This text is focused on the blessing of the resurrection and the eternal state. That is the final goal.

It is better to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Yet, the life that God gives you now is not a wasted time or without importance.

The language of verse 9 is taken in part from the world of philanthropy.

Like today, wealthy men in the ancient world wanted to be given honor for their public works of generosity.

⁸ ESV Study Bible, s.v. 2 Cor. 5:7.

Wealthy people would sometimes try to outdo each other in their giving and supposed service.

That is part of the context for the word **aim** that Paul uses in verse 9.⁹ It is a strong word. Ambition would be a good translation.

The second key word of verse 9 is the word **pleasing**.

This word was often used for those who showed excessive generosity. They were said to be acceptable or pleasing.¹⁰

Paul had no thought, of course, of simply pleasing men.

No, Paul's burning passion was to be pleasing to Christ.

And observe that this aim or ambition is not something that ends with death, it continues after death.

In the state of eternity our goal will be the same as what should be our goal in life.

This section concludes with a sobering reminder in verse 10.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

The day of resurrection will also be the great day of judgment. We will consider this more next week.

This passage in no way teaches salvation by works. Such would make no sense in light of many other passages in Scripture.

The knowledge of this certain judgment is not designed to make a believer despair over his salvation.

The knowledge of this certain judgment is not designed to make you fear death.

Rather the knowledge of this certain judgment is so that while God gives you life you will use it as much as possible to truly please Christ rather than living simply for your own temporary pleasures.

⁹ BDAG, s.v. "φιλοτιμέομαι," 1059.

¹⁰ BDAG, s.v. "εὐάρεστος," 403.

Imagine for a moment you were going to have at your house a missionary who in some sense could be compared to the Apostle Paul, someone who gave up everything in life to serve the Lord in great difficulty.

I imagine that if this missionary came to spend time at your house, your goal would be talk about more meaningful things in life.

This missionary wouldn't really care about some of the trivial things which unfortunately can easily dominate our time and thinking. It might even be somewhat intimidating to have someone like this stay at your house.

But how much more concerned should you be not simply to give a good testimony before men but to live with conviction that one day you will give account before Jesus Christ.

Conclusion:

John Calvin has stated, in agreement here with Paul,

We may positively state that nobody has made any progress in the school of Christ, unless he cheerfully looks forward towards the day of his death, and towards the day of the final resurrection.¹¹

Two applications:

1. Perfect life now, the live forever quest is utter foolishness. See 2 Cor. 4:7.
2. Physical suffering should encourage you to long for your resurrection body.

May we long not simply for death but for the resurrection and full redemption of our bodies.

¹¹ John Blanchard, eds. *The Complete Gathered Gold: a Treasury of Quotations for Christians*. Accordance electronic ed. (New York: Evangelical Press, 2006), n.p.

Prayer

Hymn 596

Benediction and Commission –

1 Cor. 15:57-58

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.