

Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC) 37

Adult Sunday School, June 26, 2022

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Q. 37. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?

A. The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.

- Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:8
- And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” Luke 23:43
- For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Philippians 1:21
- 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.” Genesis 3:19
- For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, Acts 13:36.
- and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. Ecclesiastes 12:7
- 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, Hebrews 12:23.
- whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. Acts 3:21

Compare Westminster Larger Catechism 86

Q. 86. What is the communion in glory with Christ which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death?

A. The communion in glory with Christ which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death, is, in that their souls are then made perfect in holiness, and received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies, which even in death continue united to Christ, and rest in their graves as in their beds, till at the last day they be again united to their souls. Whereas the souls of the wicked are at their death cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, and their bodies kept in their graves, as in their prisons, till the resurrection and judgment of the great day.

Breaking it down:

1. Souls made perfect in holiness, 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, Hebrews 12:23.
2. Immediately passing into glory
 - a. For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens... So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord,... Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:1,6,8
 - b. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. Philippians 1:23
 - c. And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” Luke 23:43
3. Bodies still united to Christ - For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 1 Thessalonians 4:14
4. Bodies do rest in graves - he enters into peace; they rest in their beds who walk in their uprightness. Isa. 57:2
5. Until the resurrection - And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me! Job 19:26-27

Observations¹

1. What is the condition of believers after death - It is a condition of consciousness, memory, holiness, blessedness, and waiting for the completion of their redemption by the resurrection of their bodies; the condition of their bodies is a condition of rest until the resurrection.
2. When do we enter this condition - Immediately after death.
3. No soul sleep - One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this

¹ From The Westminster Larger Catechism, A Commentary, Johannes Vos, Commentary on WLC 86

man has done nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” Luke 23:39-43

4. What kind of holiness do we possess? We will have perfect holiness in extent, degree, and stability. Never again shall we fall short of moral perfection, suffer temptation, or fall into any sin.
5. What is our chief happiness - Beholding the face of God in light and glory.
6. Where is heaven? - This cannot be definitively answered. The Bible says this is where God’s glory is specially manifested, and it is the place where Jesus Christ in his glorified human nature now lives.
7. Is our condition after death the highest and most blessed condition we are destined to enjoy? NO. This comes at the resurrection of our bodies at the Last Day. The souls of believers in heaven are patiently waiting for their bodies.
8. What about our bodies after death? The bodies of believers rest in their graves as in the beds and are still united to Christ.
9. What does this mean, united to Christ? Christ regards our bodies as exceedingly precious because he will raise them up at the Last Day. They are to be watched over. The Bible compares the dead body of the Christen to a seed which has been planted and which will spring forth to new life at the appointed time.
 - a. You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. 1 Corinthians 15:36-38
10. Cremation - NO - The body is of value as we have seen. Can God raise up a cremated body? Absolutely.
11. Purgatory - NO - Roman Catholic teaching is that very few Christians are fit to go directly to heaven, they must go to purgatory and suffer there until the fires of purgatory have taken away the rest of their sinfulness. This doctrine makes the cross of Christ of no effect, for it implies that Christ’s atonement is not sufficient to take away all a person’s sin.

Inferences²

1. The saints may be encouraged and stirred up toward perfection in holiness since this will be our state in eternity.
 - a. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:13-14
2. The wicked come to perfection in wickedness and immediately pass into hell.
 - a. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. Luke 16:22-23
3. The toils and troubles of the world should not discourage us since we will soon have an end.
4. The death of Christian loved ones is encouraging and hopeful.
 - a. But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 1 Thessalonians 4:13
5. Our dying day is the best day of our life. It is a marriage, a homecoming, a redemption day.
 - a. A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth. Eccles. 7:1.
 - b. There is no curse in our death. There may be much pain, much suffering, much loss, many tears, and even much fear. But there will be no curse. And where there is no curse, blessings abound. Death is our friend, taking us away from all the misery we’ll ever know, our chauffeur to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, our threshold to glory, our entrance upon an eternity of happiness. ³



² From A Complete Body of Divinity, Thomas Boston

³ Afternoon Study, May 29, 2022, The Nature of Christ’s Death, Flavel/La Belle