

# THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF DEATH

By

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## WHAT IS DEATH?

Death!! The very word has a connotation of solemnity and an unspoken spirit of dread. Many people do not like to speak of death nor hear the word spoken. It is an unpleasant subject. And yet, we must consider it. The Bible says, "*It is appointed unto man once to die...*" (Heb. 9:27). The certainty of that divine appointment makes it imperative that we face the reality of death and find God's answer to it.

### **The Fact of Death Is Undeniable.**

One does not have to be a Bible scholar to know that. In the history of the entire human race, there is record of only two men (Enoch and Elijah) who escaped the experience of physical death. No person living today expects to escape it, unless Jesus returns before the life span ends. We began to die the moment we began to live. The reality of death is unquestionably certain. This fact no honest man can

deny. Death is no respecter of persons. The rich die the same as the poor. The powerful die just as do the weak. People who live in a mansion die just as do those who live in a hovel. The adult dies and the child dies.

Death is no respecter of time. It may come in infancy, youth, young adulthood, middle age, or wait for senior years. But it will come. It may knock at your door in the night hours or at the noonday, but it will knock some hour.

Death is no respecter of method of departure. One person falls in death by a sudden seizure; another endures a long and painful illness before the end. One is snatched away by an accident; another has warning well in advance. However it comes, death will come.

Death has no respect for our plans, our love of family, our ambitions, nor our unfulfilled dreams. Death is a merciless fact of life. Admit it and prepare for it.

### **The Nature of Death Is Separation.**

Ecclesiastes 12:7 describes it in these words, “*Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*” Physical death is present when the spirit is absent from the body (II Cor. 5:8). This is the sum and substance of death—separation.

There is not a single verse in the Bible which teaches that death means annihilation. The Bible says the wicked die the “*second death*,” that they “*perish*,” and go into “*destruction*.” But these terms do not imply annihilation. The idea is that an unsaved person enters into a state of abysmal futility where existence is torment rather than bliss because he is deprived of the fellowship of God. Death means separation, not annihilation.

### **Two Types of Death Spoken of in the Holy Scriptures.**

There is physical death and spiritual death. Physical death is the separation of the spirit from the body. Spiritual death is the separation of the spirit from God. Physical death is described in Matthew 27:50 and Acts 5:10 as giving up the spirit, or dismissing the spirit. The separation in physical death is indicated in Ecclesiastes 12:7 as the body returns to dust and the spirit returns to God who gave it. Yes, physical death is separation of spirit and body.

Spiritual death also means separation. The Bible speaks of men being “*dead in trespasses and sins*” (Eph. 2:1). Such a person is physically alive (the spirit and body are together) but spiritually dead (the spirit and God are parted). Such a person is dead while he lives (I Tim. 5:6). Isaiah describes the state of the spiritually dead, saying, “*...Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you...*” (Isaiah 59:2). Observe the terms “*separated*” and “*hid*.” That is after death. It is not enough to have physical life and health. How are you spiritually?

### **The Origin of Death Is Recorded in the Beginning of Human History.**

God created the first man and woman, giving them an inheritance in the beautiful Garden of Eden. He gave them freedom to eat of all the trees of the garden, except one. *“The tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”* (Genesis 2:17). Satan came into the Garden, enticed the woman, who in turn enticed the man, and they ate of the forbidden fruit. As a result, death came.

Was it physical death or spiritual death which came in the Garden of Eden? It was both. Man died spiritually in that he began to fear God, did not seek fellowship with God, and was ashamed to appear before God. This indicates he was separated from God in his heart. He was a sinner—*“dead in trespasses and sins.”* Man also died physically. God announced, *“In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it was thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return”* (Genesis 3:19).

### **The Scope of Death Is Indicated in the Bible and in Our Own Experience.**

Physical death began with Adam and Eve, but it did not end with them. Romans 5:12 declares that *“death has passed upon all men.”* There is not one intelligent human who expects to depart this earth without experiencing death, unless the return of Jesus Christ interrupts the regular cycle of human experience. Physical death is a universal experience among human beings. Spiritual death has also come as a consequence of man’s sin. This is the reason why each person who reaches the age of responsibility must be saved if he expects to go to heaven. Each one is spiritually dead until he is made alive in Jesus Christ. This is why salvation is often called a resurrection in Biblical terminology (Eph. 2:1). A person is saved when he is raised up from spiritual death, given spiritual life (put in a right relationship with God), and made a child in God’s divine household. Are you spiritually dead or spiritually alive?

### **The Irremediable Nature of Physical Death Is Clearly Declared in the Bible.**

There is no man who can retain the spirit when the time comes for it to depart. The truth is stated in II Samuel 14:14, *“For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again...”* There is no return from the realm of the dead to the realm of our present physical life. Decisions and destiny which are determined here are eternally settled when death has come. Be sure you know while you are living. There is no opportunity beyond the grave. *“...Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation”* (II Cor. 6:2b).

Jesus said, *“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die”* (John 11:25-26).

*“It is appointed unto men once to die...”* (Heb. 9:27). Yes, men must die

once; but there is no need that they die twice. You cannot escape physical death, but you can escape spiritual death. Be saved today and enjoy an eternal life!

## WHAT IS IT LIKE TO DIE?

*“Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his”* (Numbers 23:10b). These words, spoken by the ancient prophet Balaam, suggest two great truths. (1) The righteous must die the same as the wicked. (2) There is a difference in the death of a righteous man and the death of the wicked.

God specifically commanded the Apostle John to write, *“Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them”* (Revelation 14:13). The Psalmist added this testimony, *“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints”* (Psalm 116:15). Since the death of a righteous person is *“precious”* in God’s sight, and those who die in the Lord are declared *“blessed,”* there is no wonder men have desired to *“die the death of the righteous.”*

A Christian may approach death with assurance and peace. This is possible because our fears are relieved in Christ. Consider these truths which give the Christian hope in his death.

### **Death Comes Only to the Body.**

All of life is marked by deterioration and re-creation. There comes a time when the process of re-creation is slower than the process of deterioration. Weakness, sickness, and eventual death follows. At that point the spirit steps apart from the body. The body falls down dead; the spirit remains very much alive.

You see, the body is not the person. It is simply a garment the real person (the spirit of man) wears while he is here on the earth. There is no more harm to the spirit to lay the body aside than there is harm to the body when you change clothes. It is possible for the “outward man” (the body) to perish at the same time the “inward man” (the spirit) is being renewed (II Cor. 4:16). The spirit of a Christian does not go to the grave with the body. *“Then shall the dust (body) return to the earth as it was: and the spirit (soul) shall return unto God who gave it”* (Eccl. 12:7).

The physical body is like a garment which the spirit wears. It is the kind of garment needed for this world. But just as you dress in different clothes when you come in from work and prepare to go out to a social occasion, so the “fitted-for-earth” body must be left behind when the spirit of man goes to God in heaven. Hence, the body lies down as if in sleep. It perishes away and returns to dust, but the real person who lived in that body (the spirit) is more alive than ever.

Understand this truth. Death brings no harm to the person who is trusting Jesus. Death comes only to the body. It is not a painful experience, but the end of

pain. Set free from a limited and dying body, the spirit hastens away into God's presence. That is what it is like for the Christian to die.

### **Death Holds No Danger for the Christian.**

Death is a promotion, not a destruction. The apostle Paul declared it is "*far better*" to depart and be with Christ than to remain here in the world (Phil. 1:23). He declared his confidence in Christ at death was such that he was "*willing to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord*" (II Cor. 5:8).

Such a hope is not mere deception. It is based upon a firm foundation. No less than 154 times the Apostle Paul declared that the Christian is "*in Christ.*" When the believer comes to "*walk through the valley of the shadow of death*" (Psalm 23:4), he fears no evil; the Lord's presence is there. Jesus keeps him safe.

How is this possible? Hebrews 2:9 and 14:15 announce that Jesus "*tasted death for every man...that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*"

What is it that makes people fear death? The answer of I Corinthians 15:56 is, "*The sting of death is sin...*" When Jesus settled the sin problem by His vicarious death and victorious resurrection, He took the sting away from death for all who know forgiveness of sins. So we can declare, "*...thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (I Cor. 15:57).

Death has no dominion over the spirit of the believer. He passes through death as one steps through a door. Death was not able to hold Jesus; it cannot hold one who trusts Him.

Some time ago I was attending a meeting where many preachers and Christian leaders were gathered. Word came to the assembled brethren of the death of two of our associates, men whose lives were devoted to God's service. At first, I wondered how I could make the announcement without casting a spirit of sorrow over the meeting. It occurred to me to say, "Today, two of our beloved brethren were promoted. They have gone to be with Jesus." It is a great thing to live with Jesus here in the world. It is a greater thing to be with Him in heaven. "*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*" (Phil. 1:21).

### **Death Is Not a State, But a Door, for the Christian**

To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. One moment the believer is here, in time, with loved ones. The next moment he is there, in eternity, with loved ones. The transfer between here and there is but an instant. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord for every Christian.

There is not a single verse of Holy Scripture which teaches that a Christian's soul goes to sleep at death and is awakened at the resurrection. No, from a conscious state on earth, he goes to a conscious state in heaven. Neither is there any Biblical

justification for the dogma that one must stop in purgatory between death and destiny in heaven. Oh, no. Rejoice in the blessed truth that the Christian goes immediately to be with his Savior, and saved kindred, in heaven.

The Bible says, *“So shall we ever be with the Lord”* (I Thess. 4:17). Death brings no destruction. Neither will it ever bring separation from the Lord Jesus. It is stepping through a door, accomplished in an instant, making a transfer from earth to heaven. *“Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.”*

### **Death Leads into Fullest Life.**

Therefore, death does not mean an end to life. Quite the contrary. At the death of a Christian, *“Mortality is swallowed up of life”* (II Cor. 5:4e). This means the Christian steps through the doorway we call death and enters into a much fuller life than he has ever known here. That is why Jesus can say that anyone who believes in Him never really dies at all (John 11:25-26). How can you call it death when a believer steps from temporal life to fullness of eternal life? Death comes as a monster to swallow up its victims, but is itself swallowed up of fullness of life.

Think of physical death in the light of these words of Jesus. *“In my Father’s house are many mansions: If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also”* (John 14:2-3). How can anyone dread the blessed transfer to the Father’s house? Jesus promised a criminal, upon the occasion of his repentance and faith, *“Today shalt thou be with me in paradise”* (Luke 23:43). That is the fullest possible life: to be in the paradise of God with the Lord Jesus! How can anyone call that death?

Death of the body is the most trying time of all human experiences. From a human standpoint, it seems so final. Man is so evidently helpless to protect himself from death. It seems death is the worst experience possible to a human being. So it is for the unforgiven and unsaved sinner. But not so for the Christian. There are many things so very much worse than death to a child of God. Those who step apart from the body to be with the Lord have not perished, nor are they eternally separated from their loved ones. Make sure your faith is firmly settled in Jesus. Then you will *“die the death of the righteous.”*

### **IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH?**

*“If a man die, shall he live again?”* (Job 14:14). This question has plagued man ever since death entered into human experience. The Christian answer is a positive “Yes.” We answer affirmatively because we believe in the immortality of man.

Belief in the immortality of man is universal. Men seem to have a witness in their own hearts that there is a part of the human constitution which is

indestructible. Even non-Christian people believe in immortality. Jesus Christ has “*brought immortality and life to light through the gospel*” by showing us what immortality really is (II Tim. 1:8-10). Let us seek an answer to the question, “Is there life after death?”

### **What Is Immortality?**

Almost every age has had its thinkers who have sought to understand and explain the concept of immortality. The ancient Egyptians thought of it as the survival of the soul in a dismal, dependent, feeble and joyless state. The Buddhist religion teaches it is the transmigration of the soul by the process of re-incarnation in some other living person or thing. Many of the nobler heathen view it as the survival of the soul in peace.

The Christian religion goes beyond all these inadequate attempts to express the meaning of immortality. Christians believe in the survival of the whole person—spirit and body—as a result of the redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ and the regeneration performed by the Holy Spirit. For the Christian, immortality means perfection in the highest blessedness in an environment suitable to such glorified existence. It means the believer will have a body of glory, like the body of the Lord Jesus, and will live in bliss in heaven. This is a far cry from all other concepts of immortality. I’m glad Jesus “*brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*” (II Tim. 1:10).

### **Why Do We Believe in Immortality?**

There are several arguments which may be produced as proof of immortality. Four of these are philosophical. (1) The rational argument is that the soul of man is one part and cannot be divided. Death is separation of parts. Since the soul cannot be divided, it cannot die. (2) The teleological argument is that man has not attained his perfect goal on earth; his development here has been imperfect. There must be opportunity after death for him to become all that he was meant to be. (3) The ethical argument is that man has not been adequately punished for evil nor rewarded for good here on the earth. Justice requires an after life to settle this discrepancy. (4) The historical argument is that the idea of immortality is natural to the human mind, being found in all nations and ages. It must be a part of the human frame since it is so universally held.

But there is a more persuasive argument than these. The Bible clearly states that man does not lose existence at death, but continues to survive in a state of bliss or of suffering after the body has died. Yes, man is immortal.

### **What Does the Bible Teach about Immortality?**

All immortality has its origins and source in God. He is described in the Holy Scripture as “*the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords;*

*who only hath immortality*” (II Tim. 6:15-16). Since God “*only hath immortality,*” man’s immortality comes because he is made “*in the image and likeness*” of God (Genesis 1:26-27).

Jesus Christ brought to the clearest meaning the immortality of man. What advantage is there in existence after death if it is a dismal, joyless and even punitive existence? Jesus “*brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*” He showed that existence after death was possible and preferable for the Christian. Hence, the believer has been “*begotten again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*” (I Peter 1:3).

### **Jesus assures Christians of their immortality by revealing four great truths.**

(1) Jesus positively declares that a person survives after death. He promised a dying man, “*To day shalt thou be with me in paradise*”; then He died upon saying the words, “*Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit*” (Luke 23:43, 46). He went before us to prepare a place for us in the Father’s house. He comes again to receive us unto Himself. Yes, Jesus taught that a man survives death. Such a truth is the basis of His doctrine of eternal judgment (II Cor. 5:10).

(2) The Bible teaches that Christians are joined to Christ on the other side of death. The Apostle Paul spoke of death as “*to depart and to be with Christ*” (Phil. 1:23). He elaborates further, “*whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord...we are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord*” (II Cor. 5:6, 8). The Christian’s union with Christ in the other world is an established fact.

(3) The Bible affirms the certainty of the resurrection of the physical body. This, too, is a proof and part of immortality—the survival of the whole person beyond death. Jesus promised “*The hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth...*” (John 5:28-29). Our resurrection is guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (John 14:19; I Cor. 15:20). The believer’s resurrection body will be like that of the Lord (Phil. 3:21). “*And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly*” (I Cor. 15:49).

(4) Believers in Christ Jesus will enter into the fullness of eternal life; body and spirit will be re-united in unspeakable joy and peace. “*Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*” (Matt. 13:43). Since eternal life is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent (John 17:3), eternity will be an unceasing experience of life eternal. That is the Christian doctrine of immortality.

### **How Does Belief in Immortality Affect Our Attitude Toward Death?**

The Apostle Paul answers for us: “*I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh*

*is more needful for you*” (Phil. 1:23-24). Death is not a tragedy for the Christian. Paul uses three terms to express the advantage of the Christian in death. He says to depart and be with Christ is “*much, more, better*”—by far the best. The unsaved man is pressed in by the sorrows of life on one hand, the terrors of death on the other. Not so the Christian. Death is the loosening of the ship from her moorings that she may head for her destiny at sea. It is the soldier striking camp, by loosening the tent ropes, in order to head for home.

The Christian is not looking forward merely “*to depart.*” Oh, no! He is anticipating the privilege of being “*with Christ.*” That will be home, eternal home. That will be rest, blessed rest. That will be the beautiful vision in its fullest sense. “*To depart and be with Christ*”—that is the concept of Christian immortality. The Christian does not look upon death as an enemy which cuts him off from all good. No, it is the door through which he steps to meet Christ and enter into the fullness of life.

Immortality is no mere future existence, no mere survival of the soul, no bare and abstract fact. It is the survival of the whole person—body and spirit. It includes perfection of the highest blessedness in an environment suitable to such a glorified existence.

But the hope of immortal glory is shared only by Christians. The unsaved have unceasing existence, too, but in the terrors of hell. Be sure you are trusting Jesus as your own personal Savior. Then you will not be waiting for death. You will be waiting for Jesus “*who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*” (II Tim. 1:10).

### **CAN THERE BE VICTORY OVER DEATH?**

There is a natural instinct in man which draws back from death. It may be inspired by either of three motives. (1) The sense of self-preservation is a normal part of our human frame. (2) There is a mystery about the experience of death which arouses a fear of the unknown. (3) Most people have adopted a totally un-Christian view of death and what follows, viewing it as pain, wading the cold waters of a river, walking alone through a lonesome valley, passing through deep shadows where dangers lurk, or entering a permanent condition of unconsciousness or semi-consciousness.

Whatever your reason to fear death, you need not fear it any longer. Christ has come to deliver you from the fear of physical death. “*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man...Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of*

*death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:9, 14-15). Your bondage to fear is broken when you understand what Jesus has done in relation to physical death.*

### **Jesus Has Showed Us the True Nature of Death.**

Death is not annihilation of the person nor an irremediable less-than-life condition into which one enters. Jesus spoke of death as laying down His life and of the end of death as taking up His life again (John 10:17-18). This He did on His cross and in His resurrection. He went through the total experience of death. He suffered; He died; He rose up from death. Then He announced, *“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death”* (Rev. 1:18). Jesus’ experience shows that death does not destroy. As life is the union of the spirit and the body, death is the separation of the spirit and the body. It is not the end of existence.

To Jesus, death was a parting from this earth to be with the Father. When He was ready to die, He cried out, *“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit”* (Luke 23:46). Having said this, He released His spirit and died. Why fear stepping through the doorway which leads to the immediate presence of God? Jesus takes away the fear of death.

### **Jesus Has Showed His Power over Death.**

Physical death held no terror for the Lord Jesus. He approached it with all calm deliberation. He knew He could lay down His life when He pleased and could take it up again when He pleased (John 10:17-18).

Christ’s redemptive mission entailed His own death. It is an attested fact of history that Christ died. It is a blessed fact of divine revelation that Christ died for our sins (I Cor. 15:3). Jesus did not die simply to show us that death was without danger. No, His death was because of *“our offenses”* (Rom. 4:25). When He died, He was *“suffering for sins”* (I Peter 3:8) since *“He bore our sins in His own body”* (I Peter 2:24). By submitting to death, He triumphed over it (II Tim. 1:10).

The triumph of Jesus over death is one of the most amazing facts in all of human history. Such a thing had never happened before, nor has it happened since. He was *“declared to be the Son of God with power...by the resurrection from the dead”* (Rom. 1:3). Only God Himself could do what Jesus did in dying by His own will and returning to life by His own power.

Jesus has become the victor over death by His own death and resurrection. He declares His victory and authority in the realm of death when He announces that He has the keys of hell and of death. No one can be held by death if Jesus would release him. He has the keys (suggesting His authority) to the doorway which opens to the life beyond and all the unseen realm of the physically dead.

Think of what terror would seize the hearts of passengers on an airplane if they knew the pilot could not control the craft. On the other hand, millions of us fly in perfect calmness because of assurance that the pilot is in control. Consider, further, the terror with which man anticipates death when he does not know that someone is in control. On the other hand, the fear is gone when we know Jesus has conquered death and exercises control over it.

### **Jesus Revealed the Sequel to Death.**

Physical death is not the end; there is something more ahead. True, it still reigns over Christians and non-Christians alike, but it will soon be totally overthrown. Imagine! A time will come when death will die! Isaiah 25:8 reads in part, *“He will swallow up death in victory..for the Lord hath spoken it.”* The Apostle Paul realized such a victory was assured by Jesus’ triumph over death. He wrote of the blessed day of resurrection, saying, *“then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory”* (I Cor. 15:57). How can we have victory over death? Paul continues, *“But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (I Cor. 15:57).

Death is followed by resurrection. Physical death comes when the spirit departs from the body. Physical death ends when the spirit is restored to the renewed body in the resurrection. Death will be banished at the return of Jesus Christ when the Christian dead are raised incorruptible, immortal, glorious, powerful, bearing the image of the Lord Jesus (I Cor. 15:22-58). In view of the certainty of the resurrection, Christians may say that the body simply *“sleeps”* in the earth awaiting the moment of awakening (I Thess. 4:15).

Not only will death end for the physical body at the resurrection, but all possibility of separation (death) will be ended forever. First Corinthians 15:25-26 says of Jesus, *“For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”* This is why heaven will be a place where there is no death; the possibility of any separation and division will be eternally gone for those who are in heaven. The same God of grace who wrought forgiveness will finally deliver the forgiven sinner from all evil consequences of his sin, including death, and deliver him into the eternal glory of heaven. Amazing grace!

Death! How shall they die who have already died to sin in Jesus Christ? What others call death, we call deliverance. The body lies down exhausted at the end of a long working day, to awake in the fresh energy of the eternal morning. Instead, then, of death being something to be dreaded, it is the hour of entrance into a more glorious life. Death is not the termination of life, but the entrance upon a larger life. Death does not separate us from God, but permits a fuller fellowship than before. Death is the means by which we are translated into the *“upper and better kingdom.”*

Assurance which delivers from the fear of death is not found in scientific proof nor philosophical arguments, but only in a faith which joins you to the living Christ in such a way as to give you a death-transcending life here and now. It cannot be logically demonstrated. It must be experimentally realized. For the Christian there is no death; he simply passes out into a larger life.

*“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life...shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom. 8:38-39).

## **WHAT ABOUT THE RESURRECTION?**

*“There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust”* (Acts 24:15). The hope of the resurrection of the dead is expressed throughout the Bible. It is expressed in terms all the way from the question, *“If a man die, shall he live again?”* (Job 14:14) to the positive assertion, *“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt”* (Dan. 12:2). Yes, the Old Testament teaches the resurrection.

But it is in the New Testament that the doctrine of the resurrection is clearly set forth. Jesus said, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live....Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation”* (John 5:25, 28-29)

Jesus related the hope of resurrection to believers in particular. He said, *“No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him; and I will raise him up at the last day”* (John 6:44). This blessed statement, along with extended passages discussing the resurrection in First Corinthians chapter fifteen and First Thessalonians chapter four, assures us that *“God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise us up by his own power”* (I Cor. 6:14).

Even in the face of such Biblical testimony, the doctrine of the resurrection is a problem to many. Multitudes question it; many doubt it; some [deny] it. *“Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?”* (Acts 26:8).

### **How Will the Resurrection Occur?**

That is to say, how can a disintegrated body be raised to life again? This question is discussed in I Corinthians 15:35-38. To raise such a question is to talk without using the mind. Look at nature. You plant a grain of corn in the ground. It germinates, sprouts, produces a stalk and other grains like the one planted. But the grain planted in the earth must die or no life comes from it. The green shoot comes out of the seed, but it is very different from the seed which is planted. The form the

new life takes is determined of God according to His purpose.

A new body can come from a disintegrated body in the same way a grain perishes and yet produces other grains. The new body comes out of the old. There is no greater mystery in the resurrection of the body than in the sprouting of grain. Do not deny because you do not understand.

*“God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him”* (I Cor. 15:38). Put God back into the picture. Resurrection is His work. Do not give up hope because of seeming impossibility. A flower bulb may look dead, but plant it in the warm earth and God will give it a body with beautiful blooms.

The emphasis on *“body”* indicates the scripture is speaking of a physical resurrection. You do not sow a body and reap a spirit. You sow a body and reap a body. Christ is the *“first fruits”* of the resurrection. We can expect to be raised with a body like His—a body of flesh and bones which is much superior to the present bodies we have.

What are the “mechanics” of the resurrection? God Himself raises up a new body out of the old one which was buried. Resurrection is God’s work.

### **What Kind of Body Will We Have in the Resurrection?**

Again, the Apostle Paul deals with this question in I Corinthians 15:39-49. He makes three great statements in answering the question, “What kind of body is possible from one already dissolved?”

(1) Our resurrection bodies will be different just as our present bodies are different (15:39-42). *“Look in nature,”* Paul explains. *“Men are different from beasts, or birds, or fishes. All flesh is not the same flesh. Observe, too, that heavenly bodies have a glory which differs from earthly bodies. Each of the heavenly bodies have their own distinct quality; each star differs from every other star in glory. That is how it will be when the dead arise.”* We will have a body like the body of the resurrected Lord Jesus, but we will not each be a carbon copy of every other. We will differ then as we differ now.

(2) Our resurrection body will be greatly improved over our natural body (15:42-44). The present natural body is corruptible (perishable), dishonorable (humiliating and embarrassing), weak (feeble and dying), and natural (fitted for the earth). Does that sound like too harsh a judgment? It is the Biblical estimate. However elegant our funeral service may be, we are in haste to bury. The temporariness of our present body is most evident at the grave.

Remember, however, *“There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body”* (15:44). The natural body is the body in which we live now. The spiritual body is the one we will receive in the resurrection. What will it be like? The resurrection body will be incorruptible (free from decay), glorious (beautiful), powerful (full of strength), spiritual (superhuman), and thus a fitted-for-heaven body. What an improvement over these bodies in which we have suffered infirmity,

pain and death. Thank God for the hope of the resurrection.

(3) Our resurrection bodies will be spiritual (15:45-49). The natural body is a soul-governed body. The spiritual body is a spirit-governed body. Consider the body of the Lord Jesus following His resurrection. It was still a body which could be seen and touched. But it was also a body which was not limited by space, could appear and disappear at will, and was no longer subject to decay and death. The Bible repeatedly states that our resurrected body will be like His (I John 3:1-2). Jesus shall fashion anew the bodies of our humiliation (which we now wear) by changing them into glorious bodies like His own resplendent form (Philippians 3:20-21). What a promise!

### **Why Will there Be a Resurrection of the Dead?**

If the saved person goes to the presence of God at death, why should there be a resurrection of the body? There are two great reasons.

(1) There will be a resurrection of the body in order to give us bodies fitted for our eternal habitation of heaven (15:50-56). Paul spoke with awe when he said, "*Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption*" (I Cor. 15:50). This is why there must be a resurrection. These corruptible bodies cannot go to heaven. God gives us a new body which is fitted for heaven as the present one has been fitted for earth.

(2) There will be a resurrection so that the last vestige of sin may be overcome (15:54-57, 25-26). Death is an enemy which came upon men as a consequence of sin (Rom. 5:12). The resurrection will bring the restoration of perfection to our physical body as redemption brought perfection to our spiritual self. Jesus will reign until all enemies are under His feet. The last enemy which shall be destroyed is death. When death starts to swallow up its victim, it is itself swallowed up in the victim's triumph. "*O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? ...Death is swallowed up in victory*" (15:55, 54).

"*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast (firmly seated and established), unmovable (persisting despite all pressures), always abounding (overflowing the edges of the cup) in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor (intense trouble and painful toil) is not in vain in the Lord*" (I Cor. 15:58).