

Death No Gateway To Heaven

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In the Christian realm today there is unscriptural teaching concerning the death of the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are constantly being told by well-meaning Christians that at death, "We go to be with the Lord." This phrase is used especially at funerals where preachers misquote or take the Scriptures out of context to reassure the sorrowing that their loved ones are not really dead, but are really enjoying Heaven in God's presence. This teaching promotes belief in the lie of Satan, rather than what God told Adam and Eve when He placed them in the Garden.

In Gen. 2:17 God said, **"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, for in the day that thou eatest of it thou shalt surely die."** In the Hebrew could read "Dying thou shalt die." This was a certainty.

In Gen. 3:1, Satan speaks for the first time in the scriptures. He asks Eve (by the Figure Erotesis for emphasis), "Yea, hath God said," or "Can it be that God hath said...?" In Gen. 3:4, Satan's second utterance, we read, **"And the serpent said unto the woman, 'Ye shall not surely die'..."** This is a plain contradiction of God's Word in Gen. 2:17. As one has said long ago, "This has become the foundation of spiritism and traditional belief as to death."

Let us search the Scriptures for ourselves and see what God has said and inspired His saints to record regarding the dead. After the fall of Adam in Gen. 3:6, when he deliberately disobeyed what the Lord had commanded in Gen. 2:16-17, we read in Gen. 3:19 God saying to Adam, **"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return unto the ground; for out of it was thou wast taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."** Notice that there is no mention of the traditional "hell." The sentence is that man returns to dust. In Job 14 we read in verse 10, **"But man dieth and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?"** Verse 12 reads, **"So man lieth down and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep."** Verses 13-15 read, **"O Thou that wouldest hide me in the grave, that Thou wouldest keep me secret, until Thy wrath be past, that Thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer Thee..."**

These verses in Job 14 teach us that Job, a believer in Jehovah God, acknowledges that man is but dust and returns to dust at death. In that state, Job, as a believer, awaits a resurrection when God will call him to awake, and Job will answer. Death is but a sleep to the believer. This is what our Lord taught in John 11, and what Paul taught in I Thess. 4 and I Cor. 15. We shall speak of these passages later.

In Psalm 89:48 the writer says, **"What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul (himself), from the hand (power) of the grave?"** We read in Psalm 115:17, **"The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence."** Psalm 49 teaches that man is not able to redeem himself, but is doomed to corruption. He is like the beasts that perish (vs. 12 & 20). God alone redeems us from the grave or dust (v.15).

In Ecclesiastes 9:5 we read that the living know that they shall die, but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward (advantage) for the memory of them is forgotten (ceases to exist). The context of Ecclesiastes 12 concerns the approaching old age of the individual. The once strong body is now like a frail

trembling person unable to help himself. Verse 7 tells us that dust (body) returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

The word for spirit is the Hebrew word *roach*, not *nephesh* (soul). According to Gen. 2:7, the Lord God formed man of the dust of the earth, or ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath (Heb.- *rieshamah*) of life and man became a living soul (Heb.- *nephesh*). So man is a soul, and without life (given by God) man is or becomes a dead soul. It is the spirit, or life, that God gives and takes away. There are no souls (as separate parts of the person) in Heaven. What did our Lord say just before He died in Luke 23:46? **"And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit: and having said thus, He gave up the ghost."** Jesus breathed life and it was committed into the Father's care. Jesus for three days and three nights was dead.

Now back to the Old Testament again to see what God caused to be recorded. In Gen. 25:8 we read, **"Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people."** This last phrase is an idiomatic figure or expression for death and burial. Abraham's people were idolaters. See Joshua 24:2. So Abraham, the man of God, the man of faith, at his death went, to the grave (dust of the earth), just as his people did who were idolaters.

In Gen. 35:29 we read, "And Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days: and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him." In Gen. 49:29 we read, **"And he (Jacob) charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite."** Verse 33 reads, **"And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people."** Again we say that this expression gathered unto his people" was a Hebrew idiom used for death and burial. There is no suggestion here of any one going to a place of bliss. It will take the resurrection power of God to raise the dead ones. In Deut. 32:49 the Lord told Moses to go up to Mount Nebo to view the land of Canaan. In verse 50 God said, **"And die in the mount...and be gathered unto thy people; as Aaron thy brother died in Mount Hor, and was gathered unto his people."**

In Deut. 34:5-7 we have recorded the burial of Moses by Jehovah, which is said of no other. Verse 5, **"So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord."** Verse 6, **"And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-Peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day."** Verse 7, **"And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim nor his natural force abated."**

In Psalm 6:5, David in his prayer said, **"For in death there is no remembrance of Thee. In the grave who shall give Thee thanks?"** Also, in Psalm 30:9, **"What profit is there in my 'blood' (or life), when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise Thee? Shall it declare Thy truth?"** Lev. 17:11 say, **"For the life of the flesh is in the blood..."**

Turning now to the New Testament we see in John 3:16, **"... that whosoever believeth in Him (Christ) should not perish, but have everlasting life."** And in John 3:36, **"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life..."** Again in John 5:24, **"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word and believeth on Him That sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."** These verses do not teach us that the believer will not die, for in the very next verse the Lord tells us, **"...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."** This living is in the resurrection. The eternal life promised us will be

fulfilled completely in the resurrection.

In John 11 we see the glory of God shown by the raising of Lazarus from the dead. In verse 11 Jesus said to His disciples, **"...Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep."** Take note here that Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, was already dead. He was not in Heaven. Verses 13 and 14 tell us exactly what the Lord meant in verse 11 when He said, "Lazarus sleepeth." Verse 14 reads, **"Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead."** Now Lazarus is seen here as already decaying (verse 39). In verse 24, Martha says to the Lord, **"I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."** She did not believe that her brother was in some place of bliss, such as Abraham's bosom. This is the error that the unbelieving Pharisees taught the Jews. It was a false teaching that the Lord exposed in Luke 16 when He addressed these unbelieving Pharisees.

We remember the Old Testament teaching that man is a soul (Gen. 2:7), and that at death his spirit, or life, goes back to God who gave it. In John 11:33, when Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews which come with her, He groaned in the spirit (or Himself), and was troubled. The word groaned has the meaning to snort as a horse does from fear or anger. Hence, to feel strong emotion or be indignant. The grave, or death, is the realm of Satan, and Christ was about to remove Lazarus from this realm ahead of the resurrection time. The Lord was soon to go to the cross and die and be raised to break the power of the grave which Satan held. Of course, Lazarus had to die again as he did not have a resurrected body. This whole context of chapter 11 was to show forth the glory of God as Jesus said in verse 40.

If you, as a Christian, one who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ as your own personal Saviour, believe that upon death a part of you can exist apart from the body, (which is exactly what the unbelieving Pharisees taught the Jews) and this part of you is enjoying himself in this state, then tell me: why did the Lord bring back Lazarus to this realm of woe and sorrow? Also, why was the command given to the twelve in Matthew 10:8 to raise the dead? And again, why did Elijah the prophet raise from the dead the widow's son in I Kings 17:17-24? And why did Paul in Acts 20:10 bring to life Eutychus, who was taken up dead?

There is no place in the Scriptures where any who were raised from death ever spoke of being in Heaven, or in a place of bliss. Turn to Acts 2:29. Peter, speaking to the Jewish people shortly after the day of Pentecost, said, **"Men and brethren, let me freely (or frankly) speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre (or tomb) is with us unto this day."** Can anyone truthfully say that David, in some form, has gone to Heaven to be with Christ? What does verse 34 tell us? **"For David is not ascended into the heavens..."**

Peter had just received the promise of God spoken of in Luke 24:49 by the resurrected Christ. This promise was to be endued (or filled) with power from on high. Peter received this on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-4. We must believe this spirit-filled man when he said David has not ascended up to the heavens. David is to be seen as still sleeping in the dust. He is awaiting the call to life by his Lord.

In Acts 13, we find the apostle Paul speaking in Antioch (in Pisidia) to the men of Israel, and those that fear God. In verses 16-37, Paul is giving forth a short summary of the history of Israel as a nation. The climax of this discussion is that God sent His son to Israel to be their Savior; they crucified Him, but God raised Him up. In verses 35-37 Paul writes, **"Wherefore He saith also in another psalm, 'Thou shalt not suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption', for David after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption. But He, whom God raised again, saw no corruption."** Here we see the contrast between David and God's Son, Jesus Christ.

The expression "fell on sleep" is used by Paul for David's dying and remaining in the grave, or state of death, until resurrection. David's body experienced decay and corruption. Christ's body did not see corruption as he was raised the third day. So Paul's teaching agrees with Peter concerning the state of David. Paul, the apostle of God, and chosen by God to preach good news to the nations concerning His Son Jesus Christ, was inspired to reveal more light on the death of the believer and his resurrection from the state of death.

In 1 Cor. 15:12-23 Paul answers the objection of some in his day who said that there is no resurrection of dead ones. Paul said, **"...if there be no resurrection of dead ones then Christ never was raised."** In verse 17, Paul carries the case one step further and said, **"...if Christ be not raised, then is our preaching vain (to no purpose), ye are yet in your sins."** Verse 18, **"Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished."** Note here, the believers who have died (fallen asleep) are also perished. If believers go immediately to Heaven at death, could Paul have uttered this strong statement "are also perished"? In verse 20 Paul shouts forth the truth: **"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept."**

Note how often in these Scriptures we read of them that sleep, have fallen asleep, asleep in Christ. We cannot ignore these words which the Holy Spirit inspired, and say of the dead that they are not really dead, but immediately ushered into God's presence. Paul tells us in verse 22, **"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."** Verse 23, **"But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming."** Christ is and has to come again. Verse 26 tells us the last enemy to be Destroyed is death. Death has not yet been put down, but because of Christ's death and resurrection Satan's hold on the power of death will eventually be put down.

We as believers in Christ are yet mortals, but we have the promise of immortality. In 1 Tim. 6:16 Scripture says that God only has immortality. In 1 Cor. 15:51-55 we see more of God's truth being revealed or made known. In verses 51 and 53 Paul says, **"Behold, I shew you a mystery (secret); We shall not all sleep, but tie shall all be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."** Paul then says that when all the above happens, then shall be brought to pass the word that is written, **"Death is swallowed up in victory. O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?"** See Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14. When Paul wrote these truths to the Corinthians, during the Acts period, Israel as a nation was on trial before God. The rulers and high priests had rejected their Messiah who had come according to their prophets. God answered Christ's prayer on the cross, **"Father forgive them for they know not what they do."** So Israel had a second chance to repent as a nation and turn to Jesus their Messiah as Peter states in Acts 2 and 3. But stubborn Israel refused and God started to deal with individuals rather than the nation of Israel. The time element was such that Israel's Great Tribulation, the time of Jacob's Trouble spoken by Daniel the prophet, was very close at hand.

Paul's message in 1 Cor. 15 includes truths concerning this period of Israel's tribulation as seen in verses 51 and 52. Paul expected that he could be one of those that would be alive at the end time of Israel's Great Tribulation. In verse 51 Paul said, **"Behold, I shew (or tell) you a mystery (secret); We shall not all sleep (but be actually alive), but we shall all be changed (that is we shall instantly put on a resurrected body)."** Verse 52, **"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we (the living) shall be changed."** Verse 53, **"For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."** Verse 54, **"So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'"** Verse 55, **"O death,**

where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?"

These verses teach us that at this time, the living believer, as well as the dead believer in Christ, must put on a resurrected, glorified body in order to be a partaker in Christ's Second Coming. The dead ones have to be made alive and be clothed in an incorruptible body, and the living mortals must put on immortality, or instantly be changed with a spiritual glorified body.

Another area in the Scriptures that is constantly used by both preachers and laymen is 2Cor. 5:8. This verse is taken out of its context to show that at death the believer is immediately alive in Heaven. This is not what the verse or context teaches us. The subject matter from 4:14 to 5:8 is the believer's resurrection and his present body and resurrection body. We have the Apostle Paul explaining to the Corinthians in 5:1 that there is a spiritual body that God has in His power to give at the time of resurrection. In verse 2 Paul says, **"For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house (habitation) which is from Heaven."** Paul expected and looked for the return of the Lord in his own lifetime during the period covered by the book of Acts. He earnestly wanted a changed body (the one spoken of in 5:1). Paul did not want to die, but rather the opposite, he wanted to be alive at Christ's coming.

Paul said in 5:4, **"For we that are in this tabernacle (or body) do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed (dead and in a naked state with no body), but clothed upon (with that new or resurrected spiritual body of v. 1), that mortality (this mortal one) might be swallowed up by life (eternal life)."** Paul was looking for the return of Christ in his lifetime, and so while still living in the flesh he could groan for that new body. He could not groan at all if he were dead. He did not want to be found naked, or dead, at Christ's coming, but, hoped to be alive, or clothed.

In verse 6 Paul explains that if we are at home (alive) in this body, we are absent from the Lord (without a change taking place or resurrection we do not see Christ). Verse 8 is often taken out of the context of resurrection, to tell people that their loved ones who have died are now with the Lord. This is not what Paul is saying at all.

He sums up the context from 4:14 to 5:8 which concerns the earthly body (mortal) and the spiritual body (resurrection body). Paul in verse 8 would be well pleased and delighted to leave this body (mortal body) and to be present with the Lord (in his resurrected body). Now the error that is prevalent is, that apart from resurrection one at death can be immediately with the Lord. This error is taught in spite of what Paul teaches in 1 Tim. 6:16, that God only has immortality. God will give us mortals immortality, but only in resurrection, not at death. Paul said in 1 Cor. 15:53, **"This mortal must put on immortality."** This is in the context of resurrection.

At almost every funeral we find the preacher contradicting his message in which he has assured the bereaved that their loved one is now in God's presence. After he quotes 2 Cor. 5:8 and not the previous verses of the context, he will most likely turn to 1 Thess. 4:14-18. These verses flatly contradict teaching that at death the believer departs to be with the Lord. Let us examine the context of this passage more closely. Both epistles to the Thessalonians contain teaching concerning the soon coming of the Lord as predicted by the Lord himself in Matt. 24 and Acts 1:1-7. The exact time of Christ's second coming was not for His disciples to know, but the signs of that early period of Acts pointed to His soon appearance. Paul taught these things during all of his missionary journeys, and wrote of them in 1 & 2 Thess. and also in 1 & 2 Cor. In 1 Thess. 1:10 Paul admonishes the believers who turned from idols to serve the true and living God, **"...to wait for His Son from Heaven, Whom He raised out from the dead, even Jesus which delivered us from the wrath to come."**

These believers in Christ were told to wait, to look for Christ's coming in their lifetime. But now since Paul had first visited them, some of the new converts had died. This had caused much sorrow among them, for now their dead ones would miss Christ's coming.

So Paul had to write words of comfort to these people and he does this in 1 Thess. 4:13-18. In verse 13 Paul writes, **"I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep (have died), that you sorrow not, even as others (unbelievers) which have no hope."** Notice the expression Paul uses here as he does so much elsewhere, 'them which are asleep.' For Paul this meant that death is likened to sleep. Now in verse 14 Paul is showing the bereaved ones why they should not sorrow over their dead ones. **"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God (through Jesus) bring with Him."**

Here are the comforting words of Paul for the bereaved saints. They will come with Jesus at His coming to earth. But, you say, they are sleeping in death. Yes, but the next few verses explain how they will come with the Lord. Verse 15: **"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive (have not died) and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not precede (go ahead) them which are asleep."** The living believers, or saints, will not go ahead of the sleeping ones to meet the Lord. In verses 16 and 17 Paul explains just how this takes place and the sequence of events. **"For the Lord Himself hath descend from heaven with a shout (word of command), with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive, and remain (the living believers at this event), shall be caught up (snatched away) together with them (the risen dead ones) in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so (by this order of events) shall we ever be with the Lord."**

This context then reveals the truth of God for this great event and the sequence in which it unfolds. These words of Paul were given to comfort the believers in verse 13. Do you not see the contradiction of words of those who tell us our loved ones are already enjoying the bliss of Heaven? Friends, it takes the resurrection time to unite the dead believers into a living spiritual or resurrection body. The Scriptures demand such an explanation. It seems to me that it is high time for the scriptural truth to be taught regarding the state of the dead that the Holy Spirit has given us to understand. To sum up this teaching regarding the state of the believer who has died in Christ, we offer the following points:

1. Adam was created by God and was, or became, a living soul when God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (Gen. 2:7). There is no basis for teaching that the man Adam had a soul in this or any other passage of Scripture.
2. If Adam disobeyed God by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam would die (Gen 2:17).
3. Satan told Eve that she would not surely die (Gen. 3:4).
4. The penalty of death was to return to the dust of the earth (Gen. 3:17-19).
5. The Old Testament teaches us that at death, the believers in Jehovah their God, gave up the spirit and were gathered to their people. This was an idiomatic expression for dying and being buried, just as their people before them had done
Gen. 49:29-33; 35:29; Deut. 32:48-50.

6. The Psalms and Ecclesiastes teach that at death the spirit (that which is life) goes back to God who gave it. Also, in death, there is no memory, for the dead know nothing (Psalms 89:48; 115:17; Ecc. 9:5; 12:7).

7. Our Lord taught His disciples that belief in Him would assure them of eternal life. They had this hope and joy within them, but it was in the resurrection that this promise was to be fully realized (John 10:27,28; 11:25,26; 5:24; 3:14-13; 3:36).

8. The expressions asleep, asleep in Christ, fallen asleep, and dead in Christ, were used by Christ and the Apostle Paul to show that the believer who had died was not to remain in the grave or death state forever. The time in the grave for the believer is so short that it is likened to going to sleep at night and awakening in the morning. Time for the dead believer does not exist (John 11:11-15; Acts 13:36; 1 Cor. 15:18-20; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

9. Paul teaches us that only in the resurrected body can the saint, or Christian, be at home with the Lord. No one lives in Heaven apart from his resurrection body. Paul strongly affirms that only God has immortality in Himself. We as living or dead believers have to put on immortality, and this is not when we die, but when Christ raises us up at resurrection (1 Cor. 15:42-44 & 51-55; 2 Cor. 5:1-8; 1 Tim. 6:14-16).