

Death of Believers

Westminster Confession 32.1

The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption: but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them: the souls of the righteous, being then made perfect of 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. And the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day. Beside these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none.

When a believer dies, the body turns to dust and the soul returns to God.

The Bible's perspective on the death of believers:

1. **Death is a curse.** Genesis 2:16-17, Romans 5:12
2. **Death is an enemy.** 1 Corinthians 15:26
3. **Death causes the separation of body and soul.** Ecclesiastes 12:7
 - Humans are created as a soul-body union.
 - Separation of soul and body at death is not a good thing. It's a bad thing.
4. **Death is tragic.** John 11:35

Two errors

Materialist bent- natural part of the life cycle, lives on in our memories etc,

Gnostic bent- this isn't Greg, this is just his shell, he is finally free of this old broken-down body

5. **Death has been conquered by Jesus.** 2 Timothy 1:10, Romans 6:9
6. **Death will be reversed for believers someday.** Romans 8:22-23, Philippians 3:20-21

Its in this larger context of redemption accomplished by Jesus that we can say...

7. **Death of believers is precious to God.** Psalm 116:15

Resurrection of Believers

Westminster Confession 32.2

At the last day, such as are found alive shall not die, but be changed: and all the dead shall be raised up, with the self-same bodies, and none other (although with different qualities), which shall be united again to their souls forever.

1. **Resurrection will happen at “the last day”.** John 5:25-29, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
2. **The same body that died will be raised.** We don't believe in reincarnation. Redemption is RESTORATIVE.
3. **Resurrected Bodies will have different qualities.** 1 Corinthians 15:12-44
 - Incorruptible – no death, no disease, no pain
 - Glory- radiant in some way
 - Power- what kind? Maybe like resurrected Jesus appearances, etc?
 - Spiritual- doesn't mean non-physical, means under direction and dominion of the Holy Spirit- this is how Paul uses “spiritual” terminology. Remember the resurrected Jesus was touched (John 20:17) and even ate (Luke 24:38-43).

It is hard to know exactly what resurrected, glorified bodies will be like. Scripture most speaks in negations: no corruption, no weakness, no dishonor, no death, no tears, etc.

The New Heavens and New Earth

The New Creation is the location of eternity for the believer. It is where we will spend eternity with Jesus and each other.

2Pet. 3:13 But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Rev. 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

1. **A New (or Renewed) Universe.** Heaven and Earth is the Hebrew way of talking about the whole universe. Its everything. So scripture teaches there will be a new (or renewed) universe.
2. **A Physical Existence.** It will be a universe suited for our renewed, resurrected bodies. We read there will be eating & drinking, travel through a city, streets (Revelation 19:9; 22:1; Revelation 21:10-11, 21-26)
3. **The nations will bring their glory and honor into the city.** Revelation 21:26-27
4. **There will be worship.**
5. **God will be there in the fullness of his glory.** Revelation 21:3-4
6. **There will be rewards.** Colossians 3:23-24
7. **All death disease and sadness will be gone forever.** Revelation 21:4
8. **We will be with the Father, Son and Spirit forever.** Revelation 22:3-5

The Intermediate State of Believers

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1. **Made perfect in holiness.** Hebrews 12:23
2. **Received into Heaven.** Ecclesiastes 12:7, Luke 23:43
3. **Behold the face of God.**
4. **Waiting for the full redemption of our bodies.** Revelation 6:10-11

Also...

5. **With Christ.** Luke 23:43, Acts 3:20-21, 2 Corinthians 5:8, 2 Thessalonians 1:7
6. **Can't be separated from the Lord.** Romans 14:8, Romans 8:38-39
7. **Not perfectly content.** Revelation 6:10-11
8. **But better.** Philippians 1:23

Scripture doesn't give many details!

"Who, when our earthly existence has ended, will wish to say more than the clear, whispering of the New Testament?" – GC Berkouwer

"But our glorification will not be complete until the resurrection of the body will have taken place. Therefore the condition of believers during the intermediate state, as Calvin taught, is a condition of incompleteness, of anticipation, of provisional blessedness" – Anthony Hoekema

Comfort of the Gospel

Luke 23:43- Jesus comforts a dying man.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-18- Paul comforts grieving Christians.

Philippians 1:20-24- Paul considers life and death.

Communion of the Saints

“The personal contacts that every believer has here on earth are limited to a few persons, but believers are nevertheless members of one holy catholic Christian church. The unity that binds all believers together, the dead as well as the living, is anchored in Christ, and through him in fellowship with same Father, in the possession of the same Spirit and in joint participation in the same treasures of salvation. The love that remains even when faith and hope disappear permanently unites all believers with Christ and each other. And that love expresses itself on our part in the fact that we remember with deep respect the saints who have preceded us; speak of them worthily; imitate their faith and good works; and spurred on by their example, run with patience the course that is set before us; and feel one with them and live in anticipation of going to them, that together with them and all created beings we may magnify the Lord. “
Herman Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics 4, pg640

Heb. 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, **23** 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, **24** and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Westminster Confession 29.1

Our Lord Jesus, in the night wherein He was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of His body and blood, called the Lord's Supper, to be observed in His Church, unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of Himself in His death; the sealing all benefits thereof, unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in Him, their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe unto Him; and, ***to be a bond and pledge of their communion with Him, and with each other, as members of His mystical body.***

Through Christ, we experience some kind of mysterious union even with those believers who have gone on to the Lord before us.