

**“State of Men after Death”
(WCF 32:1)**

WCF 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.

I. This section addresses what will happen to us when we die.

A. What are the two main parts of man?

1. We have a body.
 - a. Our bodies are a part of this creation, as they were made from the dust of the earth. This is why we need to be sustained by the earth.
 - b. “Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Gen.2:7).

2. We have a soul.
 - a. The soul is immaterial – it is not a part of the material creation.
 - b. It was immediately breathed into Adam’s body by God (see above).
 - c. This part is not sustained by the earth, but more directly by God – although everything material is also sustained directly by Him.
 - d. How do we gain our souls? There are two views:
 - (i) Traducianism: the belief that our souls are derived from the souls of our parents.
 - (ii) Creationism: the belief that our souls are immediately created by God at conception.
 - (iii) Which is the correct view?
 - (a) Traducianists argue that deriving our souls from our parents explains the transmission of Adam’s sin – the whole human race was present in his soul at the time he sinned. They also believe that this is how Levi could be said to pay tithes while in the loins of his father Abraham (Heb. 7:9). The problem with this view is that it doesn’t explain why only the one sin of Adam is transmitted to us, and why we’re not guilty of all the sins of Adam and all those our particular forefathers.
 - (b) Creationism argues that God creates the soul immediately at conception. This explains why we’re guilty of just the one sin of Adam – it is immediately imputed to us by God once we are reckoned in his line.

B. What happens to each part at death?

1. The body returns to the earth.

- a. The body, as it was formed from the earth and is sustained by the earth, returns to the earth.
 - (i) “By the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19).
 - (ii) “For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay” (Acts 13:36).
 - b. It will “wait” there until the resurrection when Christ raises it again.
2. The soul, as it is an immediate creation of God, returns to God.
- a. “For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street. *Remember Him* before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it” (Eccl. 12:5-7).
 - b. From there, the Lord directs the soul to the place where it will wait until the judgment – either heaven or hell. They are either “received into the highest heavens,” or “cast into hell.”

C. What happens to the souls of the righteous when they die?

1. First, the Lord makes them perfect in holiness and fit for heaven.
 - a. “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect” (Heb. 12:22-23).
 - b. He removes the remaining corruption so that we will be able to love Him with an undivided heart, as well as the saints and angels.
2. Second, they are received into heaven.
 - a. The Confession calls it the “highest heavens” – the place where God dwells – to distinguish it from the celestial heaven.
 - b. “For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this *house* we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord – for we walk by faith, not by sight – we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:1-8).

3. Third, they are made perfectly happy, as they behold the face of God.
 - a. This is why heaven is called Paradise – not because it is filled with the pleasures of this world, but because God and Christ are there.
 - (i) “And He said to him, ‘Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise’” (Luke 23:43).
 - (ii) “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3).
 - (iii) To see God face to face and to receive the supreme blessedness He gives has been the goal of believers throughout the centuries (Beatific Vision).
 - b. This is why every true believer desires to be in heaven.
 - (i) Paul’s example: “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if *I am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better” (Phil. 1:21-23).
 - (ii) Of course, there will still be some measure of the fear of death.
 - (a) God originally made man to live forever. The separation of the soul and body was the result of the Fall and is an unnatural thing, as is the aging of the body.
 - (b) We don’t look forward to this unnatural state, the pain that may accompany our death, or the pain of separation we experience when loved ones die.
 - (c) But we do have the consolation for ourselves and our loved ones in Christ that we will behold the glory of the Lord.
4. There they wait the full redemption of their bodies.
 - a. Our bodies have already been redeemed in principle in Christ.
 - (i) They are still in union with Christ.
 - (ii) But the effects of the Fall have not yet been reversed.
 - b. But there will be the full redemption – resurrection and glorification – when Christ returns:
 - (i) “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus” (1 Thes. 4:14).
 - (ii) “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself” (Phil. 3:20-21).

D. What happens to the souls of the wicked when they die?

1. They are cast into hell.
 - a. What is hell like?
 - (i) A place of suffering and torment.
 - (ii) "Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his

eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame'" (Luke 16:22-24).

- b. Why is hell like this? Because hell is where God punishes the wicked, giving them exactly what their sins deserve.
 - c. How long does this punishment last? It will only be temporary there. The only intermission will be the Day of Judgment. Then it will continue forever in the Lake of Fire.
2. Is there any other place the soul might go besides these two places?
- a. The Roman Church teaches the doctrine of purgatory: a place where satisfaction must be made for sin before a redeemed soul can enter into heaven.
 - (i) Mortal sin kills the soul, destroys all grace, and cuts a man off from God. If you die having committed such a sin, if it is not remedied by repentance and God's forgiveness, you will go to hell.
 - (ii) Venial sin causes the loss of grace, but does not destroy one's relationship with God. This sin can be purified through the sacrament of penance. Any sins not purified in this life, must be purified in purgatory before your soul can enter into heaven.
 - (iii) "If any one saith, that, after the grace of Justification has been received, to every penitent sinner the guilt is remitted, and the debt of eternal punishment is blotted out in such wise, that there remains not any debt of temporal punishment to be discharged either in this world, or in the next in Purgatory, before the entrance to the kingdom of heaven can be opened (to him); let him be anathema" (Trent, Sixth Session, Justification, Canon 30).
 - b. The Bible teaches no such doctrine.
 - (i) All sin is mortal sin: it all kills the soul.
 - (a) "For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law, to perform them'" (Gal. 3:10).
 - (b) "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all" (James 2:10).
 - (c) "What doth every sin deserve? A. Every sin deserveth God's wrath and curse, both in this life, and that which is to come" (SC 84).
 - (ii) If any one sin is not forgiven by God, it is enough to condemn you forever.
 - (iii) In God's economy, they are either all forgiven through faith in Christ and repentance from sin, or they are all not forgiven through the lack of these things.