

life group study guide

What Happens After I Die?

August 5, 2012



Is there a real heaven and a real hell? Is each person really immortal and destined for eternity in one place or the other? Are we sure there is life after death?

C.S. Lewis, possibly the greatest Christian thinker of the 20th century, had no doubts on these questions:

On Heaven: *"God will look to every soul like its first love because He is its first love. Your place in heaven will seem to be made for you and you alone, because you were made for it - made for it stitch by stitch as a glove is made for a hand."*

"There is no need to be worried by facetious people who try to make the Christian hope of 'Heaven' ridiculous by saying that they do not want 'to spend eternity playing harps.' The answer to such people is that if they cannot understand books written for grown-ups, they should not talk about them. All the scriptural imagery (harps, crowns, gold, etc.) is, of course, a merely symbolic attempt to express the inexpressible."

On Hell: *"Here is the real problem: so much mercy, yet still there is Hell. I am not going to try to prove the doctrine tolerable. Let us make no mistake; it is not tolerable. But I think the doctrine can be shown to be moral."*

On Immortality: *"There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendors."*

So, "What happens after I die?" There is no shortage of interest in this question, and there is no shortage of both information and misinformation either. **Take a couple minutes and see how many movies, TV shows, books, etc. you can think of that have dealt with life after death. Based on Scott Kenworthy's sermon and your knowledge of Scripture, what are the most common misconceptions? What are some of the ideas friends and family members have on the subject?**

If you're like me, you probably realize that so much of what we see and hear about eternity is not biblical. At Kingsway, we try our best to follow the Bible, whether it is popular or unpopular, easy or difficult. So let's look at how God's Word answers the question. As Scott mentions in his sermon, Jesus and the Apostle Paul abruptly corrected some of the wrong assumptions of their day. Here are a couple examples:

1. Matthew 22: The Sadducees brought to Jesus a hypothetical case of a woman who was married to seven brothers (only one at a time though – this was *Levirate* marriage and is spelled out in Deuteronomy 25:5-10). They asked: ²⁸*"So tell us, whose wife will she be in the resurrection? For all seven were married to her."* ²⁹**Jesus replied, "Your mistake is that you don't know the Scriptures, and you don't know the power of God."** ³⁰*For when the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage. In this respect they will be like the angels in heaven."* Mt. 22:28-30. Ouch! Jesus told them that they were ignorant and lacked faith!

Q. Could much misunderstanding today be because people: a). do not know the Bible, and/or b). they underestimate or lack faith in God's power?

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Q. Jesus' answer would seem to apply to many areas of faith. When you don't understand a doctrine or practice, do you diligently study God's Word to find answers? Even so, some elements of our faith may remain a mystery until heaven. But that should not be an excuse not to try to learn as much of Scripture as we can.

2. 1 Corinthians 15: Paul presents to the church at Corinth a question that he had probably heard about the resurrection of our bodies. He says, *"But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?' How foolish!"* The Message paraphrase has it this way: *"Some skeptic is sure to ask, 'Show me how resurrection works. Give me a diagram; draw me a picture. What does this 'resurrection body' look like?' If you look at this question closely, you realize how absurd it is. There are no diagrams for this kind of thing."* Paul chastises the questioner by pointing out that trying to describe in earthly terms exactly how heaven will be is impossible, which is why symbolism is used so often (streets of gold, etc.). He is saying that not having the complete blueprint for our heavenly body doesn't make it less real. This doesn't mean that it is wrong to try to imagine what heaven will be like and what we will be like there, but it does mean that we need to base our hope on what the Bible does say instead of what we may read or hear in popular media

Q. Read 1 Corinthians 15:36-44. How do the analogies of the seed and the different types of bodies deal with doubts about the resurrection of the dead?

So let's look at what we do know:

1. The Bible teaches that both believers and unbelievers will undergo a bodily resurrection when Christ returns. **Read the following passages:**

1 Corinthians 15:20-26 Daniel 12:2

John 5:28-29

Acts 24:14-15

2. The Bible teaches that all people will face a final judgment after the resurrection. This is not a judgment of whether we are saved or not – Christ's saving work on the cross covers *all* the sins of those who believe in Him – if we have trusted in Christ we will go to heaven. Rather this judgment is most likely to determine the believer's reward in heaven and the non-believer's punishment in hell.

Hebrews 9:27-28

Romans 14:10

1 Corinthians 4:5

Matt. 12:36

But the Christian need have no fear at judgment day: 1 John 4:16-18.

3. The Bible teaches that after judgment, God creates new heavens and a new earth for His people while He will condemn the unrepentant wicked to hell (the "second death").

Read Revelation 20:11-15. Those of us who have trusted Christ for salvation and submitted to His Lordship have our names recorded in the Book of Life. No fear!

The new heavens and earth will be a glorious and perfect place – a world without sin, suffering, or pain.

Picture the most beautiful places you have ever seen or been to – only you don't have to ever leave! **Read**

Revelation 21:1-5, 1 Corinthians 15:50-54. Based on these passages, what do you most look forward to in heaven? What in this earthly life are you most eager to be rid of? Where is your favorite place on earth? Ocean shore? Mountains? Rushing forest streams? How do you think heaven will surpass those?

4. The Bible teaches that although we are not saved by any of our works or by any "merit" we might possess, there are still different levels of reward for the saved and different levels of punishment for the unsaved. Many people don't like this idea, but **read Luke 19:12-19**. The two to whom the master said "well done" received

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different rewards. **Is there anything wrong or unjust with this concept?** Remember that God's judgment is perfect – and very unlike ours. Ours is so often based on talents, abilities, looks, and many outward things, but God knows our hearts, minds, and motives. **Consider Ruth from the sermons of just a few weeks ago. Was she a great speaker or important in the world's eyes at all? Yet consider how she is praised in Scripture. Can you think of any other "insignificant" people who are great in God's eyes? (Hints: Hebrews 11:23, 31; Luke 21:1-4; Mark 14:1-9).**

5. At death (before the bodily resurrection at Christ's second coming), each person will instantly be either in the presence of Christ (heaven/*paradise*) or separated from Him (*Hades*) – based on their acceptance or rejection of Jesus Christ. **Read Luke 23:42-43; Philippians 1:21-23; Luke 16:19-26; Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59.** This state of consciousness before we attain a bodily resurrection is not limbo or purgatory, but an "intermediate" state as spiritual beings. **See also 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 where Paul speaks of Christians who have died as being "asleep."** This at least implies a state of bliss – after all, sleep (without nightmares) is pleasant – and sleep also implies a distinction from the usual earthly sense of time, even though some sense of time must remain (See Revelation passage below). Other passages which support the "intermediate" state are **Hebrews 12:22-24; Revelation 6:9-11.**

In summary, after death a person is immediately either in the presence of Christ = paradise, or he/she is immediately separated from Him = Hades. Those in paradise eagerly await the final judgment at Christ's Second Coming at which they will receive their eternal resurrection bodies. In contrast, those in Hades fearfully await judgment to the "lake of fire."

So, to borrow the title of Chuck Colson's book: **How Now Shall We Live?**

1. Christians should not fear. We have assurance of our salvation not based on anything we have done or will do, but on what Christ has already done.
 2. In loving response to what Christ has done for us, and since we no longer need to fear the future, we should try to please our Lord through dedication to holy living, and to use whatever gifts God has given us for service to the church and to the rest of the world as well.
 3. Refrain from judging. We all will face judgment. Only God can judge perfectly.
 4. Rejoice in our salvation and in our firm hope that we will live forever in the new heavens and new earth.
- Read Romans 6:3-11 and Philippians 4:4-9.**

Q. What is at least one thing from these passages that you can put into practice today?

Q. Knowing that you are saved and that you have been promised eternity with God in heaven, what is an attitude(s), habit(s), or practice(s) that you need to repent of today?

Finally, **read Hebrews 12:1-4 and Romans 8:18-25. What do you think? Are you living with that kind of hope and patience?**