

The Gospel Wars

Lesson #13 Physical Death

I. Lesson Introduction

Death comes to all men in this life. There are none who avoid physical death. The exception to this absolute rule only occurs to the sanctified church at the end of this church age when all true believers will be caught up in the rapture to be with Christ just before the tribulation, to be with Him forever.

This view of the rapture is not a traditional “Reformed” view. There are some Reformed theologians who hold to a literal Millennium and perhaps some other dispensational views such as the rapture of the church. They include such men as:

Bill Hill,	Gordon H. Clark,	J. Oliver Buswell,	J. Barton Payne,	R. Laird Harris,
Paul Wolley,	Allan MacRae,	Francis Schaeffer,	D. H. Kromminga.	

This exception to all men dying is in the rapture of the church explained in Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians church in **1 Thess 4:13-18** below.

A second passage that details the nature of the “rapture” of His saints is found in **1 Cor 15:50-58** below.

This rapture occurs when Jesus returns for His saints from the “Church Age”, both those alive at that time and those who have passed into death to be present with Christ in heaven, leaving their old body of flesh behind in the grave (or wherever!)

II. Definitions

Death: “The termination of life brought about by the entrance of sin into the world. (For the Christian, death brings us into the presence of God because of Christ’s payment of the penalty for our sins.)”
Grudem’s Systematic Theology; p. 1239

III. Scriptural Basis (Unless Otherwise Noted, all Scripture is from the 1995 New American Standard – Updated edition.)

Relevant Scriptural Passage	Doctrinal Point Addressed
<p>Death as a Curse from the Fall</p> <p>Luke 16:19-31 <i>Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. ²⁰And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, ²¹and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. ²²Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. ²³In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. ²⁴And 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.' ²⁵But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.' ²⁷And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house — ²⁸for I have five brothers — in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' ²⁹But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' ³¹But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'</i></p>	<p>Wealth can distract from dependence on God.</p> <p>The rich man, devoid of God, found himself in Hades in torment awaiting judgment by God.</p> <p>Lazarus and the rich man were separated by a great chasm that no man could overcome.</p>
<p>Mt 10:28 <i>Therefore do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.</i></p>	<p>Outside of Christ, we should be entirely afraid!</p>
<p>Heb 10:30-31 <i>For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." ^{Dt 32:35} And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE." ^{Dt 32:36} It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.</i></p>	<p>To fall into God’s judgment is a terrifying thing.</p>

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Death as Deliverance From Sin Unto Christ Jesus Our Lord	
<p>Ps 115:17-18 <i>The dead do not praise the LORD, nor do any who go down in silence; but as for us, we will bless the LORD from this time forth and forever. Praise the LORD!</i></p>	<p>Our praise of God continues in death. We remain in relationship with the One who set His love upon us.</p>
<p>Ps 116:15 <i>Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His godly ones.</i></p>	<p>God loves it when He brings a saint of God home to be with Him.</p>
<p>Is 57:1-2 <i>The righteous man perishes, and no man takes it to heart; and devout men are taken away, while no one understands. For the righteous man is taken from evil, he enters into peace; they rest in their beds, each one who walked in his upright way.</i></p>	<p>As a saint of God, our death is an entry into eternal peace. The struggle against sin is over, never to trouble us again.</p>
<p>Lk 23:42-43 (The repentant criminal crucified with Christ) <i>And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."</i></p>	<p>Christ new exactly where He would be immediately upon His own death and that this repentant criminal would be immediately there too!</p>
<p>1 Cor 15:50-57 <i>Now I say this, brethren, that <u>flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.</u> ⁵¹Behold, <u>I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed,</u> ⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and <u>the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.</u> ⁵³For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP" ^{Is 25:8} in victory. ⁵⁵"O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" ^{Hosea 13:14} ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; ⁵⁷but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.</i></p>	<p>We cannot in this body inherit the kingdom of God. Upon death, our souls immediately go to be with God. Our body stays behind decaying in its death. In order for complete victory over death, our body must be changed in the coming victory of the glorification of our bodies.</p>
<p>2 Cor 5:6-10 <i>Therefore, being always of good courage, and <u>knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord</u> — ⁷for we walk by faith, not by sight — ⁸we are of good courage, I say, and <u>prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.</u> ⁹Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. ¹⁰For <u>we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.</u></i></p>	<p>While in this life we are trapped in this body of flesh and yet are responsible to bring it under our authority to serve God. When we die and leave this old flesh, we are immediately at home with the Lord. After our body is glorified, we will stand before Christ, accountable for our earthly works in this life, in this body of flesh.</p>
<p>Phil 1:21-26 <i>For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²²But if I am to <u>live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose.</u> ²³But I am hard-pressed from both directions, <u>having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better;</u> ²⁴yet <u>to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.</u> ²⁵Convinced of this, <u>I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith,</u> ²⁶so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.</i></p>	<p>Living in this old flesh with all of its weaknesses is part of God's plan that we must be fruitful in this life! For the saint, we are obligated to live this life in full service to God in accordance with His will and purpose.</p>
<p>1 Thess 4:13-18 <i>But <u>we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.</u> ¹⁴For <u>if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.</u> ¹⁵For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede</i></p>	<p>Here Paul instructs us about those who have already died in Christ. We have no need to grieve for them as is normal for lost men</p>

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<p><i>those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore comfort one another with these words.</i></p>	<p>because we know that they are with Christ in heaven at this time.</p>
<p>2 Tim 4:6-8 <i>For I am already <u>being poured out as a drink offering</u>, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; ⁸in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.</i></p>	<p>Paul is in prison in Rome, not a house arrest. He is in a dungeon and will never come out, but rather will be executed. His life is <u>being poured out as a drink offering</u>. In his immediate future there lies a glorious presence with Christ, with reward for his faithful service. This same reception is for him and for all who have loved Christ's appearing!</p>

IV. Church Position and Importance

The church has always taught the importance of the death of her saints. This element of physical death has not always been spoken as part of this “order of salvation”.

I have included physical death as part of the “Order of Salvation” in this series, because it is so clear that upon this physical death, that God has ordained for us, we are finally freed from our physical nature that is so inclined to sin.

It is in death that we truly come to rest in Christ and await the final step, which is the glorification and final reunion with our bodies.

V. Church Weaknesses, Corruption, and/or Abandonment of True Doctrine

We were forced out of the Garden of Eden because of Adam’s fall and our depraved nature.

Gen 3:22-24 *Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" — ²³therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.*

The church has often correctly emphasized the curse of death upon mankind, but has sometimes failed to emphasize fully the grace found in the death ordained by God for those who are redeemed by the blood of Christ.

This is a glorious step in our final redemption which will be complete by our coming glorification of our physical body in resurrection power. (Last Lesson #14 Glorification of the Body)

VI. Conclusion / Discernment Being Needed

When we who are “in Christ” pass away in death, in accordance with God’s gracious will and the result of this death of the physical body is a great blessing to us as individuals as we enter into the peace and presence with Christ in heaven.

In death, we leave this old sinful world and our sin nature completely behind for the first time in our own existence. Sometimes this issue is explained more clearly by stating these three points:

1. In our “New Birth”, we are saved from the Penalty of sin.
2. In our “Sanctification”, we are saved from the Power of sin.
- 3rd In our “Physical Death”, we are saved from the Presence of sin.