



What Happens After I Die?

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MAIN POINT

The gospel equips us to face the fear of death head on.

INTRODUCTION

What are some ways that people in our culture try to avoid thinking about death or hide the signs that death is coming? Why do people do this?

**How do you cope with the death of loved ones?
How do you tend to respond?**

**Does the pain of losing someone you love ever really go away?
What does that tell us about death?**

We live in a culture that is constantly trying to sell us a hundred different creams and lotions that try to hide the reality that our bodies are not permanent. Whether we face terminal sickness or someone around us dies from an accident, we all will be confronted with the reality of our mortality at some point in our lives. God, however, doesn't want us to live in fear of death. In fact, God hates death. He hates it so much that He took on human flesh, suffered on the cross, and defeated death by rising from the grave.

UNDERSTANDING

READ [ECCLESIASTES 9:1-6](#).

What does Solomon conclude about human destiny ([vv. 1-2](#))?

What theme unifies verses [3-6](#)?

When Ecclesiastes says there is one fate for the righteous and the wicked, it means physical death, not heaven or hell. We cannot control or avoid death by our works. But people draw the wrong conclusion from this; they assume that since there is nothing they can do to change the fact that death awaits all, they might as well cast away all restraint and live for themselves. They become full of evil and madness.

How is death described in this text?

Ecclesiastes wants us to take death seriously. If we do, we will realize how fleeting are the passions that fuel our lives. But despair and self-abandonment are not the answer.

Why is there death in the world? Why must all people face death?

Why is the thought of death so terrifying for so many people?

The Bible says "through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned" ([Romans 5:12](#)). Adam and Eve were told not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because in the day that they ate of it they "would

surely die.” Death is the curse of the fall, it is a result of living in a broken and sinful world. It is important for us to note that death was not God’s intention but something that we in our sin invited into the world. Death is terrifying because of its finality, but more than that, death is terrifying because, deep down, we all know that we are sinners. We fear facing God’s righteous judgement. As Christians, though, we have the benefit of knowing that after death comes life, and this truth puts death into perspective.

READ [PHILIPPIANS 1:18-30](#).

Paul wrote the book of Philippians from prison in Rome where he was awaiting trial for preaching the gospel. Paul was unsure of his fate and was aware that at any moment he could be sentenced to death. Paul, however, does not use his circumstances as an opportunity to try and win the sympathy of the church at Philippi. Instead, Paul uses his grave circumstances as an opportunity to encourage the Christians in Philippi to live boldly for the sake of the gospel.

What does Paul mean by “for me to live is Christ, to die is gain” ([v. 21](#))?

Paul was convinced that whether he lived or died, he would have the privilege of continuing to honor Christ ([v. 20](#)). Paul was focused on living for Christ and proclaiming the gospel. He could face a very uncertain and potentially terrifying future (execution) because he knew that neither death nor life could keep him from living for the honor and glory of Jesus Christ.

Which of the two options before Paul does he say is better? Which does he choose?

Paul states very clearly in [verse 23](#) that his desire is “to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.” However, he recognizes that if the Lord spares him from death now, that he will have the privilege and joy of continuing to spread the gospel and encourage churches. Consequently, Paul seems convinced that the Lord will spare him so that he might continue to encourage the church at Philippi and help them grow in their walk with Christ ([v. 25](#)).

Notice that it was not just the promise of eternal life that allowed Paul to face death without fear, but his focus on the glory of God. How might focusing on living for the honor and glory of Christ free you from the fear of death?

As Christians, we know exactly why we exist—to glorify God. When we focus on living for Christ and His glory, death doesn’t seem so daunting. In Christ, our future is secure; He has saved us from sin and promises to take us to be with Him forever when we die. Paul did not fear the possibility of death. Instead, he used it as motivation to make the most of the time God had given him to proclaim the gospel and encourage churches in their pursuit of Christ. The more we focus on Christ, the more we will take advantage of the opportunities God has set before us to spread His fame and build His church.

APPLICATION

How does Jesus’ death and resurrection free us from the fear of death?

How does the hope we have in Christ allow us to think of death as a motivation to pursue Christ?

How might we employ the reality of death to motivate others to pursue Christ?

How might times of tragedy or deathly sickness be a good opportunity to share the gospel?

PRAYER

Pray that your group would not fear death, but instead, trust that Jesus has conquered sin and death on our behalf. Pray that we would view the reality of death as motivation to live more fully for the glory of Christ and the spread of the gospel. Pray for specific situations your group mentioned. Pray that in each situation, the person would trust Christ rather than fear failure.

COMMENTARY

ECCLESIASTES 9:1-6

9:1. The Teacher finally takes the problem of theodicy in an astonishing direction: the apparent injustice in the world is proof of the sovereignty of God. No one by even righteous deeds can gain control over God and coerce blessing from him (“love” and “hate” refer respectively to divine favor or disfavor). One must acknowledge that all is in God’s hands. The Teacher’s understanding of divine sovereignty is much closer to Paul’s teaching on grace and the law than is generally recognized.

9:2. Death is equally certain regardless of how righteously or wickedly one has lived. This both raises the question of whether or not righteousness is adequately rewarded and forces the Teacher again to reflect on the problem of death. This verse thus looks back to the problem of divine justice ([8:9-9:1](#)) and ahead to the problem of death ([9:3-12](#)).

9:3-6. Death is “the evil” ([v. 3](#)), not simply a natural phenomenon. This too is a meditation on the fall; humanity has been cut off from the tree of life. The astonishing thing, however, is that instead of reckoning with the meaning of death, humans fill their lives with the distractions of a thousand passions and squander what little time they have to immediate but insignificant worries. To be sure, the Teacher prefers life to death. Even a lowly dog is better off than a dead lion. But the reason the Teacher puts forward for choosing life is another surprise: because the living know they will die! The explanation is that the living may yet reckon with the reality of death and in so doing embrace the joy life has to offer, but no such possibility exists for those who have already died. Their time has passed.

PHILIPPIANS 1:18-28

1:19. Paul remained optimistic. Deliverance (lit “salvation”) may recall Job’s attitude ([Job 13:13-18](#)). Paul expected exoneration because Christianity was not illegal throughout the Roman Empire at this time. Paul hoped for prayers, the “human” side, and help, divine assistance. “Prayers” implies intense intercession. God answers prayers with help (lit “supply”), either something the Holy Spirit provides (a resource), or the presence of the Holy Spirit (the “Comforter”). The grammar of this verse joins “prayers” and “help,” indicating Paul’s dependence on both working together.

1:20. Ashamed (lit “put to shame”) implies cowering, running from battle, or embarrassment. Paul expected that Christ would be highly honored in his body. The physical body symbolizes earthly life. On earth, if Christ is not glorified in the body, He is not glorified at all. Further, Paul hoped Christ would also be glorified in his death.

1:21-24. Living is Christ restates the theme of [verse 20](#). If he carried on living, every aspect of Paul’s life would continue to reveal Christ, which would make his life fruitful and worthwhile. Likewise, his death would be gain since it would usher him into Christ’s presence. Paul felt pressured (lit “in a dilemma”), acknowledging the benefits of both outcomes. The phrase is more necessary for you expresses Paul’s servant heart. A selfish outlook would make Paul prefer glorification and reward (via death) over continued life and ministry, but his priority

was that Christ be honored and glorified.

1:27-28. Live your life (lit “conduct yourselves as citizens”; cp. [Acts 23:1](#)) alludes to Philippi’s political history, reminding the church of its higher citizenship (in the kingdom of God). Paul’s primary concern, that you are standing firm in one spirit, reflected military pride. Roman armies stood ready for combat regardless of the enemy’s level of strength and preparedness or the distracting enticements of culture. The church must manifest the same readiness. “One spirit” expresses the believer’s unified attitude. One mind (lit “same soul”) means that believers share “life.” Together they prevent divisiveness like Paul witnessed at Rome ([vv. 14-17](#)). Standing firm involves working side by side. “Working” comes from athletics where teams contended for a prize (cp. [4:3](#)). Harmony, not individualism, achieves God’s purposes. Standing also involves not being frightened...by your opponents. Soldiers used “frightened” to describe horses that might easily be startled.