



NOTE: The following is the first of a series on devotions on death, dying, and falling asleep in Christ. It is prepared in answer to the requests of some of our readers.

16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: 17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (Gen 2:16-17)

Death is a separation from God. There is no life apart from that granted by God. He breathed the breath of life into the nostrils of Adam and he *became a living soul* (Hebrew, NEPHESH). (Genesis 2:7) But Adam did not remain a living soul – he brought sin and death upon himself and all mankind through his disobedience to his Maker. Just as man does today, Adam ate from the wrong Tree of the Serpent instead of the right Tree of Life which is Christ. The very nature of Adam's body began to lose the nature of eternal being as he partook of the wrong fruit, in fact, instantaneously! Adam did not drop dead physically at that moment, but he did drop dead spiritually.

There are, in biblical theology, differing views on the nature of death and the disposition of the soul following that final curtain. I have studied them in detail and am not entirely satisfied that any one of them is entirely correct. God does not provide an answer for every mystery revealed in Holy Writ. Even the understanding of certain prophecies is reserved to the time of their fulfillment. By so doing, this reveals to us, on hindsight, the absolute foreknowledge and Providence of God. We see in fulfilled prophecy the immutable sovereignty of God in bringing all things to pass. The concept of final death is alien to the destiny of the saints of God. Death is merely a doorway to eternal life and bliss with our Lord. To the damned, death is altogether different. Death to the incorrigible sinner is the last curse and penalty of the law. There are, for the unsaved, two deaths – the second death applies only to those who have rejected Christ. (Rev. 2:11) But even the first death is figurative in the sense that it is only the *shadow of death* and not death in reality. (Psalm 23) Remember, there are only two destinations – Heaven or Hell. We shall all spend eternity in one or the other.

Above and beyond every other consideration, we must know that physical death comes to one and all alike, but that physical death is the death to which all men are heirs.

The nature of the death of a child of God is completely different from the physical death of a lost person. We can see that difference abundantly illustrated by the account given by Christ of the beggar, Lazarus, and the Rich Man. (Luke 16:19-31). The beggar was escorted by angels to the bosom of Abraham, but the Rich Man was buried and woke up in Hell. This brings us to the topic of the intermediate state resulting from death. Where are the dead in Christ between physical death and the resurrection, or what is the so-called intermediate state?

Our Lord Jesus referred to the death of those to whom He had granted grace and salvation as a 'SLEEP.' That spiritual sleep of Lazarus of Bethany and of other saints is shrouded in mystery to our understanding. Had the Lord desired for us to know the mystery in detail, He would have told us. But there are some aspects of the death of a saint that is revealed in Scripture. I do not believe the Scriptures point to a 'soul sleep.'

First

Physical death is NOT spiritual death:

There is, in reality, no such event as spiritual death to the Child of God. We are all born *dead in trespasses and sins*. (Eph 2:1 & 2:13) That is an original and ongoing spiritual death, true; but it is not an event to which a person who has been called and chosen of God is subject. It is the condition of fallen man prior to the new birth described by our Lord to Nicodemus (John 3).

Second

God is very aware and considering of the death of His people:

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. Psalms 116:15)

Third

Those who are in Christ NEVER die a spiritual death:

They never die in reality. Consider the account of Lazarus of Bethany. Though Lazarus was physically dead, our Lord referred to that death as a *sleep*. *Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.* (John 11:11) Furthermore, Jesus rebuked Martha when she mourned her brother's passing with the following exchange: *23 Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. 24 Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. 25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: 26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?* (John 11:23-26) The cold and moldering corpse of Lazarus lies in a stone-cold tomb, yet Jesus says Lazarus, and all who *liveth* and *believeth* in me shall NEVER DIE! Why did Jesus use the term *liveth*? I believe He is stipulating that our calling and reception must be made prior to the last breath we take in this life. No saving decisions are made in the grave.

We find death being referred to as sleep in many other sections of the Bible – both Old and New Testament. God's words are certain and immutable, so we must receive and believe them as such. *So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David.* (1 Kings 2:10) *And Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead.* (1 Kings 11:43) *And the days which Jeroboam reigned were two and twenty years: and he slept with his fathers, and Nadab his son reigned in his stead.* (1 Kings 14:20) *And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.* (Gen 49:33) *For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: 37 But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.* (Acts 13:36-37)

With reference to the Lord's Supper, Paul says: *27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. 29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. 30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.* (1 Cor 11:27-30) This seems to mean, at least in my conception, those who are the known and chosen of Christ may sin beyond the bounds of a good reputation and witness, in which case, God will call them home.

In further proof of my third point, I raise two separate occasions of the righteous dead being very much ALIVE. The first is the event of Moses' death on Mt. Pisgah. *1 And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the LORD shewed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan, 2 And all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea, 3 And the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar. 4 And the LORD said unto him, This is the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither. 5 So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. 6 And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day. 7 And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated. 8 And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days: so the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.* (Deut 34:1-8) God buried Moses' body in a lonely grave in Moab, but not Moses. We see Moses once more in Scripture alive and well with the Lord atop the Mount of Transfiguration. *1 And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, 2 And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. 3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.* (Matt 17:1-3)

If Moses was still in that lonely grave in Moab, how, pray tell, did he appear with Christ on that Mount?

What of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? In His reprimanding of the Sadducees, our Lord said: *32 I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.* (Matt 22:32)

It is to be greatly desired we who are in Christ know and believe we shall never truly die except that superficial death called sleep by our LORD.