

Part VII: The Doctrine of the Last Things

Chapter XXVIII: Physical Death and the Intermediate State

1. Physical Death

Physical death is variously represented in Scripture. It is spoken of as the death of the body, as distinguished from that of the soul, Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:4, as the termination or loss of animal life, Luke 6:9; John 12:25, and as a separation of body and soul, Eccl. 12:7; Jas. 2:26. It is never an annihilation, but may be described as *a termination of physical life by separation of body and soul*. Pelagians and Socinians teach that man was created so that he had to die, but this is not in harmony with Scripture. It teaches us that death resulted from sin and is a punishment for sin, Gen. 2:17; 3:19; Rom. 5:12, 17; 6:23. Instead of being something natural, it is an expression of divine anger, Ps. 90:7, 11, a judgment, Rom. 1:32, a condemnation, Rom. 5:16, and a curse, Gal. 3:13, filling the hearts of men with dread and fear. But since death is a punishment for sin, and believers are redeemed from the guilt of sin, the question naturally arises, Why must they still die? It is clear that it cannot be a punishment for them, but must be regarded as an important element in the process of sanctification. It is the consummation of their dying unto sin.

2. The Intermediate State

Opinions differ very much as to the condition of man between death and the general resurrection. The most important theories call for a brief discussion.

a. The modern idea of Sheol-Hades. The idea is very prevalent at present that at death both the pious and the wicked descend into an intermediate place, which the Old Testament calls Sheol, and the New Testament, Hades. It is not a place of reward or punishment, but a place where all share the same fate, a dreary abode where life is but a weakened reflection of life on earth, a place of weakened consciousness, of slumbrous inactivity, where life has lost its interests and the joys of living are turned into sadness. But this is hardly a scriptural representation. If the terms Sheol and Hades always

denote a place to which both the pious and the wicked descend, how can the descent into it be held up as a warning to the wicked, Ps. 9:17; Prov. 5:5; 7:27; 9:18; 15:24; 23:14? And how can Scripture speak of God's anger as burning there, Deut. 32:22? It was in Hades that the rich man lifted up his eyes, Luke 16:23, and he calls it a "place of torment," vs. 28. It is better to assume that the words Sheol and Hades are not always used in the same sense, but sometimes denote the grave, Gen. 42:38; Ps. 16:10, sometimes the state or condition of death, represented as a place, 1 Sam 2:6; Ps. 89:48, and sometimes the place of eternal punishment, Deut. 32:22; Ps 9:17; Prov. 9:18.

b. Purgatory, *Limbus Patrum*, and *Limbus Infantum*. According to the Church of Rome the souls of those who are perfect at death are at once admitted to heaven, Matt. 25:46; Phil. 1:23, but those who are not perfectly cleansed at death — and this is the condition of most believers — enter a place of purification called purgatory. The length of their stay there varies according to the need of individual cases, and can be shortened by the prayers, good works, and masses of pious friends or relatives. This doctrine finds no support in Scripture. — The *Limbus Patrum* is the place where, according to Rome, the Old Testament saints were detained until Christ set them free between His death and resurrection. — And the *Limbus Infantum* is the supposed abode of all unbaptized children. They remain there without any hope of deliverance, suffering no positive punishment indeed, but excluded from the blessings of heaven. Neither of these views find any support in Scripture.

c. The sleep of the soul. The notion that at death the soul enters into a state of unconscious repose or sleep, was advocated by several sects in the past, and is now also a favorite doctrine of the Irvingites in England and of the Russellites in America. It has a peculiar fascination for those who find it hard to believe in a continuance of consciousness apart from the brain. They find support for it in Scripture passages which speak of death as a sleep, Matt. 9:24; Acts 7:60; 1 Thess. 4:13, or seem to say that the dead are unconscious, Ps. 6:5; 30:9; 115:17; 146:4. But the former simply speak of death as a sleep because of the similarity between a dead body and a body asleep, and the latter simply stress the fact that the dead can no more take notice of nor share in the activities of the present world. Believers are represented as enjoying a conscious life immediately after death, Luke 16:19-31; 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; Rev. 6:9.

d. Annihilationism and conditional immortality. According to these doctrines there is no conscious existence, if any existence at all, of the wicked after death. Annihilationism teaches that man was created immortal, but that they who continue in sin are by a positive act of God deprived of immortality and finally destroyed or bereft forever of consciousness. According to the doctrine of conditional immortality, however, man was created mortal, and only believers receive the gift of immortality in Christ. The wicked ultimately perish completely or lose all consciousness. The result is the same in both cases. These doctrines are supposed to find support in the fact that the Bible represents eternal life as a gift of God in Christ, John 10:27-28; Rom. 2:7; 6:23, and threatens sinners with death and destruction, Ps. 73:27; Mal. 4:1; 2 Pet. 2:12. But the Bible clearly teaches that sinners will continue to exist, Matt. 25:46; Rev. 14:11; 20:10, and that there will be degrees of punishment of the wicked, Luke 12:47-48; Rom. 2:12.

e. Second probation. Some scholars hold that they who die in their sins will have another opportunity after death to accept Christ. No man will perish without having been offered a favorable opportunity to know and accept Jesus. They appeal to such passages as Eph. 4:8-9; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 1:19,20; 1Pet. 3:19; 4:6. But these do not prove the point. Moreover, Scripture represents the state of unbelievers after death as a fixed state, which cannot be altered, Eccl. 11:3; Luke 16:19-31; John 8:21, 24; 2Pet 2:4,9; Jude 7, 13. Their judgment depends on what they have done in the flesh, Matt. 7:22-23; 10:32-33; 25:34-46; 2 Cor. 5:9-10; 2 Thess. 1:8.

To Memorize. Passages proving:

a. That death is a punishment for sin:

Rom. 5:12. "Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned."

Rom. 6:23. "For the wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

b. That believers are victorious over death:

1 Cor. 15:55-57. "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

c. That Sheol-Hades is in some cases a place of punishment:

Ps. 9:17. "The wicked shall be turned back unto *Sheol*, Even all the nations that forget God."

Prov. 15:24. "To the wise the way of life goeth upward, That he may depart from *Sheol* beneath."

Luke 16:23. "And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments."

d. That believers are with Christ immediately after death:

2 Cor. 5:8. "We are of good courage, I say, and are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord."

Phil. 1:23. "But I am in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ; for it is very far better."

e. That unbelievers continue to exist after death:

Matt. 25:46. "And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life."

Luke 12:47-48. "And that servant, who knew his lord's will, and made not ready, nor did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; but he that knew not, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes."

Rev. 14:11. "And the smoke of their torment goeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, they that worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."

f. That there is no escape after death:

Luke 16:26. "And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, that they that would pass from hence to you may not be able, and that none may cross over from thence to us."

2 Pet. 2:9. "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment."

For Further Study:

a. What do the following passages teach respecting death? 1 Cor. 15:55-57; 2Tim. 1:10; Heb. 2:14; Rev. 1:18; 20:14.

b. Do you think the following passages support the doctrine of purgatory? Isa. 4:4; Mic. 7:8; Zech. 9:11; Mal. 3:2; Matt. 12:32; 1 Cor. 3:13-15.

c. Does the word of Jesus to the dying thief on the cross fit in with the doctrine of the sleep of the soul? Luke 23:43.

Questions for Review:

1. How is physical death represented in Scripture?
2. How can you prove that death is not something natural?
3. What is the connection between sin and death?
4. Is death a punishment for believers? What purpose does it serve?
5. What is the modern idea of Sheol-Hades?
6. What objections are there to this theory?
7. What do these terms denote in Scripture?
8. How do the doctrines of annihilation and conditional immortality differ?
9. What is the supposed Scripture basis for these?

10. How can you disprove them?
11. What is the Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory, *Limbus Patrum*, and *Limbus Infantum*?
12. What is the doctrine of the sleep of the soul?
13. What is its supposed Scripture basis? How would you refute it?
14. What is the doctrine of second probation?
15. Does Scripture support or contradict this doctrine?