

DEATH

“we shall not all sleep”

Key question

What is the meaning of death?

Key text

Hebrews 9:27

“It is appointed to men to die once, and after that comes judgment.”

Key Definition

Death

Death is the absence of life. In its final spiritual form it may involve a consciousness of being wholly separated from God. Physical death is a byproduct of spiritual death.

Introduction

1. The study of eschatology is the study of the final events of history and God’s plan.
2. Eschatology can be divided into two parts.
 - a. **Individual** eschatology - that which happens to a person after death.
 - b. **Cosmic** eschatology - that which happens to all creation at the end of time.
3. Two mistakes to avoid in studying this topic
 - a. **Eschatomania** - An over confident preoccupation with the events of the end time.
 1. The Late Great Planet Earth is an example of a conservative version of the meaning of Revelation which predicts the end of time as within this generation.
 2. A liberal counterpart sees the present revolutionary age as an eschatological phenomena. It reduces the subject to social, political revolution in the present time.
 - b. **Eschatophobia** - A fear of the subject.
4. Questions that need to be answered in the study of this topic.
 - a. Does eschatology pertain primarily to the future or the present? Four views of the book of Revelation.

1. The **futuristic** view - The events described are yet to be fulfilled at the end of history over a short period of time.
2. The **preterits** view - The events described took place in the past close to the time of the books writing.
3. The **historical** view - The events described pertain to the history of the church.
4. The **symbolic** or **idealist** view - The events describe truths that are timeless and not tied to historical matters.
- b. Is eschatology primarily optimistic or pessimistic? Should we expect things to get better or worse as history unfolds.
- c. Is divine activity or human effort thought to be the agent of eschatology? How much of God's plan is in our hands?
- d. Does eschatology refer to this world or the next?
- e. Does eschatology give hope to the church alone or also to the whole world?
- f. Does eschatology promise blessings to individuals only or also to the whole of creation?
- g. Is there a special place for Israel in the future?
5. Some popular modern views of eschatology
 - a. **Liberalism** - prophetic literature concerning the second coming of Christ is symbolic of the triumph of good over evil in history.
 - b. **Schweitzer** - Jesus would, in a dramatic way, return to fulfill what he failed to realize at his first coming.
 - c. **Dodd** - The prophetic events that Jesus taught were fulfilled in his day.
 - d. **Bultmann** - Prophetic events are timeless symbols of existential experience.
 - e. **Moltmann** - We are coworkers with God in bringing about the kingdom.
 - f. **Dispensationalism** - In an attempt to take the Bible literally when at all possible and at the same time respect all aspects of it as inspired, an elaborate scheme of end time events is pieced together.

A. **Individual eschatology - what happens to the individual at death?**

1. The meaning of death
 - a. **Physical death** (the first death - Rev.21:8) - the termination of physical life.
 1. The literal end to the physical life of the body - rooted in spiritual rebellion.
 2. The principle of sacrifice - II Cor.4:11-12 "So death is at work in us, but life in you".
 - b. **Spiritual death** (the second death - Rev.21:8) - the termination of spiritual life.
 1. The literal end to the spiritual life - Matt.10:28 "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."
 2. The principle of inability to respond spiritually - Eph.2:1-2 "And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked." This was the death that Adam and Eve experienced when they ate the forbidden fruit - Gen.3:3, Rom.6:23, Ezek.18:4,20.

- c. Key passages:
 1. **Eccl.12:7** “And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”
 2. **Jas.2:26** “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead.”
 - 2. Death is not natural to man.
 - a. Adam was mortal in the sense that we were capable of dying before the fall.
 - b. At the fall, Adam and all who were his descendants were subject to death.
 - c. Paul viewed death as an enemy - I Cor.15:26.
 - d. Death is a judgment on humanity by God - Ps.90:5-7, Gen.3:3.
 - e. Death is a reminder of our alienation from God through sin. Rom.5:12-14
 - 3. Characteristics of death.
 - a. Physical decay.
 - b. Emotional despair.
 - c. Social isolation.
 - d. Spiritual emptiness.
- B. Near Death Experiences (NDE).**
1. The facts
 - a. About 1/3 of Americans who claim to have been on the verge of dying report some kind of NDE.
 - b. As a result of these experiences nearly all people develop a greater sensitivity to spiritual issues and a greater concern for others.
 - c. There seems to be no correlation between a person’s religious affiliation before the NDE and the kind of experience they have.
 - d. Those who go through NDE seem to be naive and open to those who would abuse their trust (cults).
 - e. Those who have gone through NDE have a higher than average divorce rate and problems in the work place.
 2. Publications -*Life After Life* by Raymond Moody, 1975.

Questions that you should be able to answer.

1. Specific facts you should know.

- a. What are four ways in which Christians have interpreted the book of Revelation?
- b. What are some of the mistakes that the church has made in dealing with Biblical prophecy?
- c. What is soul sleep and why is it not Biblical?
- d. What is purgatory and why is it not Biblical?

2. Issues that you should be able to discuss.

- a. What is the significance of eschatology?
- b. How have Christians differed in their understanding of eschatology?
- c. Of what can we be certain concerning death?

3. Questions you should wrestle with.

- a. What are we to make of after death experiences and testimonies in modern times?
- b. In what sense is death both a blessing and a curse?