

1 Thessalonians 4: Death Swallowed Up in Victory!

Death and the Resurrection

- Death is the penalty for sin. No death anywhere before Adam sinned! (Romans 5:12)
- The penalty has been paid in full. (2 Timothy 1:9-10)
- Therefore, we are no longer in bondage to death. (Hebrews 2:14)
- The body decays, but the soul leaves this "earthly tent." (Ecclesiastes 12:7; Luke 8:55)

What Doesn't Happen to the Soul?

NOT Annihilated—the atheistic view.

- Jesus teaches of consciousness beyond this life. (Luke 16:19-31)
- Reuniting of body and soul of both believers and nonbelievers expected. (Acts 24:15)

NOT Soul Sleep—the insensitivity of the soul after death.

- Conscious souls after death can remember, talk, experience pain or pleasure. (Luke 16:19-31)

NOT Reincarnated—the continual cycle of death and rebirth, broken only through self-effort.

- Man dies once, then the judgment. (Hebrews 9:27)

NOT Purgatory—intermediate state where believers' souls are "purified" before entering heaven.

1. It's God's job to perfect us. (Philippians 1:6)
 - Christ died to clear our consciences of guilt from sin. (Hebrews 9:14)
 - The best candidate for "purgatory" went directly with Jesus to God's presence. (Luke 23:43)
2. Purgatory violates two scriptural truths.
 - Truth #1: Belief, not behavior, is the basis for receiving eternal life. (John 5:24-29)
 - Truth #2: Only the blood of Jesus cleanses from sin. Cleanses us from all sin and unrighteousness. (1John 1:7) Jesus canceled our debt of sin and forgave us ALL our sins. (Colossians 2:13-14)
3. What about praying for the dead?
 - No purgatory so no need.
 - No second chance so no need.
4. What about praying to the dead?
 - Worship God and serve Him only. (Matthew 4:10)
 - Jesus is our High Priest; go directly to Him. No one is closer to Him than you! (Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:24-25)
 - Conclusion: pray to God for the living to accept His free gift of salvation.
5. What about babies and children who die before choosing Christ on their own?

- Trust the character of God.
- Depend on the grace of God.
- Jesus paid the penalty for everyone. (Matthew 18:5-6,10; 19:14) Children are born with an innate sense of belief or trust in the existence and love of God the Father and Jesus. As they grow older, adults convince them not to believe it and thus reject Jesus.

What Does Happen to the Soul of a Believer?

It goes to HEAVEN—the spiritual realm in which the glory of God's presence is manifest, and in which dwell the angels of God, and all believers who have departed this world. This is what we do know:

- Heaven opened, the glory of God was visible, Jesus was standing ready to receive Stephen's spirit. (Acts 7:55-60)
- Jesus brings the souls of the dead believers with Him, so they must be with Him first. (2 Thessalonians 4:14)
- Jesus wants us to be with Him in glory! (John 17:24)
- He is preparing a place for us so we can be with Him. (John 14:3)
- Our immediate destination after death. (Philippians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:8)
- We receive comfort. Angels carried Lazarus there. (Luke 16:19-31)
- There is joy and pleasure in God's presence. (Psalm 16:11)
- We are released from the struggle with sin. (2 Corinthians 5:19)

Confidence for Your Faith

In Christ, we share in his victory over death! We grieve, but we grieve not as those who have no hope, rather as those who are certain of our reunion with loved ones who have gone before, of receiving a glorious body that will never weaken or decay, of entering a wonderful new life beyond our fondest dreams, and of forever being with the Lord! The death of Jesus Christ was SUFFICIENT for all sins but it is EFFICIENT only when you personally put your faith in Him.

"Early pagans thought of graveyards as the dwelling places of departed spirits, but they had no pleasant names for these places. The [Romans] cremated bodies and placed the ashes in urns set in niches. These niches looked like dovecotes, so they were called columbaria. But the Christians used the name koimatarion, from which we get cemetery. The koimatarion was the barracks of the soldiers. Thus, at death the believer falls asleep as at the sounding of Taps. But the angel will blow the trumpet of resurrection, just as the bugler sounds reveille. Then the dead in Christ will come out of the barracks of the dead, to be forever with their glorious Captain." (Donald Grey Barnhouse)

Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O Death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!
Once He died, our souls to save, Alleluia!
Where's thy victory, boasting grave? Alleluia!
Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!

Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!
Death in vain forbids Him rise, Alleluia!
Christ hath opened Paradise, Alleluia!

Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!
Made like Him, like Him we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

Charles Wesley