

Grace Bible Church
Pastor Robert R. McLaughlin

CONSOLATION AND COMFORT IN DEATH

IS DEATH A DEPARTURE OR AN END?

Dying is a part of life. It is an appointment with God that all members of the human race will have to keep. If you have personally believed in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, *1 Thessalonians 4:13* states that you have a hope that death is not an end but simply a departure from one place to another.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope.¹

Regarding the question that has come up concerning what happens to those who have already died and are buried, the apostle Paul says that we don't want you to be in the dark any longer. First of all, you must not carry on as those people who have nothing to look forward to, as if the grave were the last word or the end. As a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you should have tremendous confidence and assurance that death is merely a departure from this life to a life of no more sorrow, no more pain and no more suffering.

However, for the unbeliever who has refused to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior, his appointment will be at the Great White Throne Judgment, also known as the last Judgment of Christ, prior to being sentenced to the Lake of Fire for all eternity.

Revelation 20:11-15 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from Whose presence, earth and Heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is [the book] of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them; and they were judged, every one according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

The believer, on the other hand, at the time of his death, will meet the Lord Jesus Christ face to face.

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

Physical death is an experience that we all must face alone. Just as the spiritual life must be lived individually, so also the journey from life on earth to life in eternity will be unique for each one of us; no two will have the exact same experience or departure. No one can live your life for you and no one can die for you. Apart from the Rapture generation just before the Lord Jesus Christ comes back, all believers will experience physical death.

Hebrews 9:27 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment;

McLaughlin Bible Ministries – Consolation and Comfort in Death

Ecclesiastes 3:1-2a There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under Heaven – a time to give birth and a time to die ...

The Rapture refers to the resurrection of believers who have died during the Church-age, after which those believers alive on earth will be caught up with the newly resurrected believers to meet Christ in the air.

1 Thessalonians 4:14-18 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the Word of the Lord, that we, who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

The Bible teaches that life is divided into two general categories, living and dying. For the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the experience of dying can be a glorious occurrence. Whether it is seeing a loved one passing on into the eternal state, or whether it is a personal experience that you have to face yourself, you will have the opportunity to trust in God to the fullest, and you will come to understand that He has saved His greatest blessings for the dying part of life. Therefore, functioning in the plan of God and using the problem solving devices that He has provided are just as important in dying as in living. The person who has been living in the plan of God and utilizing the Word of God is ready to face death. In fact, dying will be his greatest experience.

Each believer approaches dying as a winner believer or as a loser believer, as an invisible hero or as one who has shattered his own life. For those who have made good daily decisions in living the Christian life, whose number one priority was the Word of God, the prospect of death will be the ultimate experience, and something to anticipate with joy. For those believers who have rejected God's plan and have followed their own path, death will **not** be something to look forward to. Let us learn to live our lives so that we might one day say, *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 2 Timothy 4:7.*

Four Reasons Not to Fear Death

1. The believer's death is a matter for the sovereignty of God. Once you settle in your mind that God decides perfectly the time and manner of your death, and the time and manner of the death of a loved one, including a child, you will no longer have a problem with it. You may have sorrow for a short period of time but ultimately, if you trust in the character and nature of God, you will know that whatever He does or allows, there is a justified reason for it.

Job 1:21 Job said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Dying is the one part of the Christian's life that does not depend upon the individual's free will or his volition; it depends entirely on the sovereignty of God. The timing and manner of death is not a matter for us to decide; nothing will prolong or shorten a believer's life beyond God's timing for his death.

Psalms 68:20 God is to us a God of deliverances, and to God the Lord belongs escape from death.

The believer has no control over the time, place or manner of his death; it is a matter of God's sovereignty, wisdom and integrity. Until the Lord is ready to take us home to be with Him, we are going to continue to live on this earth. Mankind has no authority or choice over when or how he will die.

Ecclesiastes 8:8 No man has authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority over the day of death; ...

The dying stage of a Christian's life may be short or it may be prolonged, it may be a period of suffering or it may be pain free. Whatever it is, it will be perfect because God is perfect and all of His decisions are perfect. He is never wrong, unfair or unjust. Any time you become critical or upset, blaming God for a decision He has made concerning death, take a step back and remember: He is never wrong, He can never make a mistake, and everything that He has ordained is perfect and right. Since the omniscience of God knows all of the facts in each individual case, the matter of the physical death of a believer is always a wise decision.

2. Death has lost its power over the believer.

The greatest encouragement in the world that each and every believer should take to heart is the absolute truth that death has lost its power over him.

Isaiah 25:8 He will swallow up death for all time, and the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces, ...

1 Corinthians 15:16-26 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

1 Corinthians 15:54-57 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the Law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Death is simply a shadow and a valley that we must pass through to enter the eternal state.

Psalms 23:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

Once the believer understands that he is eternally united to the One who has gained the victory over death, the Lord Jesus Christ, he can live in confidence, free from the bondage and slavery that the fear of death causes.

Hebrews 2:14-15 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

3. The believer's death is precious in the eyes of the Lord.

The death of every believer, winner or loser, is always valuable and precious in the eyes of the Lord. Even though some will die as losers, all believers go to Heaven, and this is a triumph for God over Satan. Any time a person makes a decision to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, God is glorified, and when that person is brought home there is joy in Heaven.

Psalms 116:15 Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones.

This scripture applies to all the saints, both winners and losers.

4. Death means being face to face with the Lord in a state of perfect happiness.

At the moment of death, the believer is immediately transported into the presence of the Lord. He leaves behind his physical body, which is no longer needed, and enters into Heaven with his soul, spirit and interim body.

McLaughlin Bible Ministries – Consolation and Comfort in Death

2 Corinthians 5:6-8 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord – for we walk by faith, not by sight – we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

Heaven will be a place of perfect happiness and contentment. None of the problems and pressures we face here on earth will follow us there. Our interim bodies will suffer nothing unpleasant; there will be no mourning, no crying, and no pain.

Revelation 21:3-4 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

The apostle Paul, in the book of Philippians, stated the attitude we should all have toward death.

Philippians 1:20-21 According to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Why did Paul say in verse 20, *Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body*? Why didn't he say that Christ would be exalted in his soul or his human spirit? The answer is because the body experiences dying, not the soul or spirit. And the death of a believer comes at a time of the Lord's choosing; it is entirely His decision.

Paul knew that he was a spiritual winner. He knew that Christ Jesus had everything under control and that the future would be extraordinary. Paul knew that God saves the best for last, lavishing blessings in dying and death, while making the final preparations for life in Heaven throughout all eternity. Why did Paul have such peace and confidence? Through metabolized doctrine and advancement to spiritual maturity, he came to the realization that God had everything under His total control and was saving the best for last. Paul had lived a wonderful life, absorbed with his relationship and service to the Lord. He was a man in a state of contentment as he stared death in the face; he knew that dying was actually the beginning of a life that would last and endure forever.

The loser believer, on the other hand, will face dying as a time of anxiety, worry and fear. There will be no dying grace, and no tranquility of soul or peace of mind. The cosmic Christian is a loser in both life and death. However, the day he dies is still better than the day he was born. He will meet the Lord Jesus Christ face to face, and he will live with Him for eternity. But as the cosmic Christian was a loser in living and dying, he is also a loser in the eternal state, for any greater blessings and rewards will be lost to him forever.

How to Deal With the Loss of a Loved One

Most people carry great sadness in their soul for friends and loved ones who have died. Though memories are filled with sorrow and compassion, we learn from Bible doctrine that life must go on; God still has a plan and purpose for you, and that includes growing in grace and in knowledge of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. You are not abandoning the life of a loved one if you continue to live your life. The first lesson to be learned during this time of loss is to never let your grief turn into resentfulness. True sorrow should remind you of the grace of God and of all the wonderful provisions He has lavished upon us. Use these provisions to grow, and use them to comfort others who are also grieving. It is a time to develop tenderness and compassion for those who have also lost loved ones, especially for widows and widowers who have lost their dearest and most beloved lifetime companion. It is a time to come to understand and rejoice in the fact that your loved one is face to face with God in a place of perfect happiness and contentment. Their journey is complete, they are at home with the Lord, and they have the best of everything.

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Remember that one day you will be reunited with them. This thought alone should be a source of great comfort — knowing that your loved one is now a citizen of Heaven. Life must go on, but this doesn't mean you should forget your loved one. Instead, it is a chance to cherish the times you shared together, and it is a chance to learn about the grace of God as it relates to physical death.

John 14:1-3 “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you, for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”

The Departure of a Child

One of the greatest sorrows is the passing of a small child. The life of an infant or toddler so quickly taken away always raises the question, “Why did God allow the death of such a small child?” We must remember that the death of this child is just a beginning of no more sorrow, no more pain, no more death. *And he will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be death; there will no longer be mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away, Revelation 21:4. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through Our Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 15:57.* Because of the substitutionary salvation work of Jesus Christ on the cross, any child or adult who has not reached the point of accountability is automatically saved.

King David understood this when he told his servants, after knowing that his son, who was born seven days prior, had died, *[He said,] “While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who knows, the Lord may be gracious to me, that the child may live.’ But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.” 1 Samuel 12:22-23.*

It is so important to understand that the child did not die in vain. God had a reason and a purpose for it that only He truly knows and understands.

WHY

I've sat beside a tiny crib and watched a baby die
As parents slowly turned toward me to ask, oh Pastor, why?
I've held the youthful husband's head and felt death's sting and sigh
A widow looked with tears and said, dear Pastor, tell me why
I've seen a gold star mother weep and hold a picture nigh
Her lonely breast and softly ask, why, oh Pastor, why?
I've walked away from the cemetery where stillborn babies lie
A mother stretches empty arms and asks me, Pastor, why?
I watched my drunken father leave our home and say goodbye
While I looked into my mother's face I asked, please tell me why
I've heard the white tip-tapping cane that leads a blinded eye
And then a darkened lonely voice cries, Preacher, show me why
I've caught a fiancée's burning tears and heard her lonely cry
She held an unused wedding gown and shouted, Oh pastor, why?
I've heard a cancer patient say, it is gain for me to die
Then he looked into his daughter's face and mutely whispered, why?
I've seen my mother stand beside two tiny graves and cry
And though she never let me know, I know she wondered why
I've heard an orphan faintly say, who gazed into the sky,

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Though Mom and Dad have gone away, my Preacher will know why
I tiptoed to my Father's throne so timid and so shy
To say, Dear God, some of Your own are wanting to know why
I heard Him say so tenderly, their eyes I'll gladly dry
Though they must look through faith today, tomorrow they'll know why
If now they find the reason that their hopes have gone awry
In Heaven they will miss the joy of hearing Me tell them why
And so I found it pleases Him when I can testify
I'll trust my God to do what's best and wait to find out why
(Author Unknown)

Another lesson to be learned concerns our relationship with those around us who seek to be a comfort to us. We should never impose our sorrow on others or demand that they remain with us in a state of grief and remorse. We cannot ask our friends to stop living simply because we are carrying a heavy burden; to do so is arrogant. This type of arrogance is called the demand syndrome. It is not right to resent others who seem to be having a good time while we are mourning. We must eventually release friends from any obligation they may feel to share the sorrow we will bear for the rest of our lives. It is not fair for us to cast a shadow of gloom, and then expect all of our friends to enter into it. This is not the way God intended for us to face the death of a loved one.

The reason for this is twofold: (1) From the inventory of Bible doctrine, the Word of God in our souls, comes the realization that our loved one is in a state of perfect happiness, regardless of whether they were spiritual winners or losers in the execution of the predesigned plan of God; and (2) We can take comfort in the fact that the Lord loves us very much. He knows everything that we are going through, and He will carry us on to victory. Remember the principle, with your sorrow you have the chance to carry the comforting fragrance of the memories of your loved ones, and with that fragrance you will never resent the laughter and the happiness of those around you.

Ecclesiastes 3:4 is an important verse that helps us remember that we do not honor our departed loved ones when we perpetuate grief into abnormality: *A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance.* The words **laugh** and **dance** are used merely to represent social life.

The communion table is a great example of what our attitude should be toward those loved ones we have lost to death. When Our Lord said in *Luke 22:19*, "...do this in remembrance of Me," He was challenging us to remember His life and death without turning it into abnormal grief. This principle is again explained in *1 Corinthians 11:23-26*: *For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.*

Notice the emphasis on the Lord's death. We are instructed to call to remembrance His death and what it accomplished for us. We are instructed to remember Him who died for us. Likewise, we can remember loved ones without being arrogant. We can remember them and carry our burden of sorrow without entering into the demand syndrome. We will all carry sorrow one day, but it is not an excuse to carry it in arrogance. Remember this important principle: **Your loved ones are**

in Heaven enjoying perfect happiness. They do not want you to have anything less here on earth.

In summary, when your heart is broken and others around you are laughing and enjoying life, remember — do not despise or resent them, and do not impose your heavy burden on them. Your sorrow is a private matter between you and the Lord. Your loneliness belongs to you, and it is a tribute to the ones you love who are now in Heaven. Christian virtue does weep with those who weep, and it does rejoice with those who rejoice, but there comes a time when those who weep should be as those who do not weep.

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

1 Corinthians 7:30 And those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess;

With Bible doctrine as a guide, you can turn the sorrow of a lost loved one into joy and tenderness. This is expected of Christians. There should never be even one moment of bitterness; Jesus Christ has given us the victory over death. The winner believer will not fear dying because he has accumulated a tremendous inventory of Bible doctrine while alive. Just as he used the ten problem solving devices while living, he uses them in his dying days. The problem solving devices include the rebound technique, the filling of the Spirit, the faith-rest drill, grace orientation, doctrinal orientation, a personal sense of destiny, personal love for God the Father, impersonal love for all mankind, +H or sharing the happiness of God, and occupation with Christ as the priority solution to life.

Each of these problem solving devices functions in the life of the winner just as much in dying as in living. For the mature believer especially, life goes on centered around the Lord. When we are occupied with Christ, sometimes we laugh, sometimes we cry, but we never have regret. When we are occupied with the Lord, sometimes we are filled with joy, sometimes we are filled with sorrow, but never are we bitter. This attitude allows us to echo the words of Paul in *Romans 14:7-8, For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.*

¹All verses are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, unless otherwise noted. Corrected translations by Pastor Robert R. McLaughlin from the original Greek or Hebrew text appear in brackets.