

Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

Lesson 2

The Living and the Dead

Manuscript



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INTRODUCTION

From the earliest times of recorded history, human beings have wondered about life after death. Will our souls live forever? Will we have bodies of some sort? Will we retain our individual minds? The only reliable answers to these questions come from God's revelation in Scripture. Of course, the Bible doesn't tell us everything we might want to know. And sometimes Christians interpret its words very differently. But we all agree that Scripture gives us great hope for a glorious future in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the second lesson in our series *Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology*, and we've entitled it "The Living and the Dead." In this lesson, we'll consider what theologians commonly call "individual eschatology."

In a prior lesson, we defined eschatology as "the study of last things" or "the doctrine of last things." We also said that eschatology covers the entire period of the last days, which began with Jesus' life and ministry and will be completed when he returns. In this lesson, we'll focus on a subcategory of eschatology called individual eschatology. Individual eschatology is:

the study of how individual human beings experience the events of the last days

— especially with regard to life, death, the intermediate state, and the final state of our bodies and souls.

Our lesson on "The Living and the Dead" will divide into three parts. First, we'll see what the Bible says about the present state of human life. Second, we'll look at the intermediate state that begins when we die. And third, we'll consider our final state at the consummation of the eschaton. Let's turn first to our present state.

PRESENT STATE

As we saw in our prior lesson, humanity currently lives during the last days, also known as "the eschaton." As a result, we all suffer the hardships of this age, like sin and death. But these problems are partially alleviated by the blessings of the age to come, like forgiveness and salvation. In humanity's present state, believers, or "the regenerate," experience the effects of both ages simultaneously, while unbelievers or "the unregenerate" overwhelmingly experience the hardships of this age.

In theology, the term “regenerate” means “recreated” or “reborn.” So, we could refer to those who are regenerate as the spiritually “living.” It follows then, that the theological term “unregenerate” means “not recreated” or “not reborn.” In other words, the unregenerate are spiritually “dead.”

In light of this distinction, we’ll address humanity’s present state in two parts. First, we’ll consider those who are unregenerate. And second, we’ll turn to those who are regenerate. Let’s begin with the present state of the unregenerate.

UNREGENERATE

Scripture tells us that fallen human beings are born spiritually dead. The unregenerate remain in this state of spiritual death because they haven’t been renewed or “regenerated” by the Holy Spirit.

We’ll focus on three characteristics of the unregenerate: first, their spiritual death; second, their moral inability; and third, their enmity with God. We can start by exploring their spiritual death in more detail.

Spiritual Death

It’s tempting to think of spiritual death in ways that parallel physical death. But this can be a little misleading. When we die physically, our souls are separated from our bodies. Our bodies are incapable of independent action, and eventually decay to the point that they return to dust. But when we’re dead spiritually, our souls are still active in our bodies. The unregenerate continue to think, feel, dream, make choices, and engage with the world in almost every way the regenerate do. They aren’t robots, nor are they mindless bodies. So, what exactly *is* spiritual death?

When we think about spiritual death, I’m reminded back in the Garden. It’s really interesting when we look at the Old Testament, especially in Genesis, where God had told Adam, he says, “Of any tree of the garden you may eat.” Some translations in English and other languages will say, “You may *freely* eat” ... Clearly God was saying, “You can eat until your heart’s desire. You eat all you want. But there’s this one tree, and if you eat from that tree ...” — as I say — “You will be as dead as a doornail.” So clearly, God said that as soon as Adam ate of that fruit that he would die, not only physically, but spiritually as well. All throughout the Old Testament we see the horrible wages of sin. Even in the New Testament, Paul is going to talk about that spiritual death. We’re going to see verses such as “The wages of sin is death” ... Another verse I love is “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” ... It’s so important to understand that sin has separated me from God, that sin has caused all sorts of

trouble. When I first understand that I have sinned, and I've fallen short, then I think, "What can I do? Where can I turn?" That's when the gospel comes in.

— Rev. George Shamblin

In the beginning, God created Adam and Eve with spiritual life. So where did spiritual death come from? The short answer is: God. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden, God cursed humanity with spiritual death. In Genesis 2:17, God said to Adam:

You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die (Genesis 2:17).

But as we learn in Genesis 3, Satan spoke through the serpent and tricked Eve into eating the fruit. And after Adam saw that Eve had eaten it and lived, he ate some too. Then, according to the terms of the covenant God had made with Adam, God cursed them. They didn't die that day, at least not physically, but they became spiritually corrupt. And this spiritual corruption is the essence of spiritual death. In Romans 7:14-25, Paul referred to this as our "sinful nature." He described it by saying that sin lives inside our very bodies and even takes control of our minds.

Worse, spiritual death affects all the naturally conceived descendants of Adam and Eve. Passages like John 3:5-7, Romans 8:10, and Colossians 2:13 indicate that every human being, except for Jesus, comes into this world spiritually dead. As Paul indicated in Romans 5:12-19, Adam was our representative and, therefore, we all share in his punishment.

One of the most difficult doctrines, people often say, that the Bible teaches is how, as in Adam, all sinned — as Paul talks about it in Romans 5 — and therefore, sin leads to punishment and death, and we're in Adam. Is this Adam's sin, and why am I being blamed for this? How do we answer that question about the fairness of God in relation to our culpability in Adam's culpability? ... People often say that they object to that, but what they usually don't object to is the other side of Paul's argument, which is, as in Adam all sinned, so in Christ shall all be made alive. And if we object to the one, why wouldn't we object to the other? What God is saying is that he treats humanity in two categories and two categories only. This is extraordinarily helpful for all kinds of racial conflict or class conflict. From God's point of view there are only two categories: we're either in Adam or in Christ... This is one we should accept because it's taught in the Word, and for the practical reason that if we are to accept that we can be in Christ and made alive, we need to accept the other side of the coin that Paul teaches.

— Dr. Josh Moody

Having seen that in the present state the unregenerate are characterized by spiritual death, we're ready to consider their moral inability.

Moral Inability

The term “moral inability” refers to the fact that unregenerate human beings have:

no capacity to please God or merit his blessings.

Most significantly, they can't appeal to him for forgiveness, or work their way to salvation.

Augustine, the bishop of Hippo who lived from A.D. 354 to 430, famously taught that before humanity's first sin, Adam and Eve lived in the state of *posse non peccare*. This Latin phrase can be translated literally as, “to be able not to sin.” In its theological use, however, the phrase is more commonly translated as “the ability not to sin.” According to Augustine, Adam and Eve were empowered to avoid sin completely. But they also had the ability to sin. And when they sinned, they moved from the state of *posse non peccare* to the state of *non posse non peccare* — the *inability* not to sin. They and all their naturally generated descendants lost the moral ability to avoid sin.

In places like John 8:31-44, and Romans 6:6-20, both Jesus and Paul compared moral inability to being slaves to sin. And Paul taught in Ephesians 2:1-5 that the unregenerate live under the control of sin, following the sinful ways of the world and its demonic leadership. And they remain in that state of spiritual death, incapable of rescuing themselves until God mercifully saves them. Yes, unregenerate people still do things that are *outwardly* good. They love and provide for their children. They promote justice. They even lay down their lives for others. But unfortunately, all of these acts are tainted because the unregenerate aren't motivated by love for God. Jesus addressed this issue in Luke 6:43-45. He compared the works of the unregenerate to bad fruit produced by bad trees. His point was that human beings act according to their hearts. Therefore, those with evil hearts — namely, the unregenerate — are morally incapable of doing works that God considers to be good. Paul described this problem in Romans 8:6-8 when he said:

The mind of sinful man is death ... the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God (Romans 8:6-8).

Are the unregenerate morally able to please God? The short answer is “no,” because the concept of pleasing God has to be framed in terms of relationship... So, works that are pleasing to God are necessarily the product of a relationship between man and God. In order to please God in how we live, we must first believe that he exists and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him — that's the language of Hebrews. So, this is why the Anglican Articles of Religion say that the

works of the unregenerate necessarily have the nature of sin, because they are works, they are things done by people outside the context of relationship with God, and since humanity is made for relationship with God, that is the necessary context for which any action that pleases him must happen.

— Dr. Carey Vinzant

So far, we've discussed the unregenerate in terms of spiritual death and moral inability. And that brings us to their third characteristic: enmity with God.

Enmity with God

One of the most harmful aspects of spiritual death is that the unregenerate are God's enemies. Scripture teaches that Satan and his followers are constantly at war with God and his faithful angels. And the unregenerate are on the side of Satan. They love their sin and hate God. Listen to what Paul said of the unregenerate in Ephesians 2:1-3:

[They are] dead in [their] transgressions and sins ... follow[ing] the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient... gratifying the cravings of [their] sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts... [They are] by nature objects of wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3).

It's hard to imagine a stronger statement of the enmity that exists between God and the unregenerate. The unregenerate aren't simply bystanders or innocent civilians in the spiritual conflict. Instead, as we read in places like Romans 5:10, and Colossians 1:21, the unregenerate are themselves God's enemies. And because of this, they stand condemned, doomed to suffer God's everlasting wrath. As Jesus told the unbelieving Jews in John 8:42-44:

If God were your Father, you would love me ... You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire (John 8:42-44).

And in James 4:4, James wrote:

Don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God (James 4:4).

None of this is to say that the unregenerate knowingly and purposefully oppose God, although some clearly do. Most of the unregenerate, however, are simply deceived. After all, false religions, and even atheism, claim to promote true worldviews. But even when the unregenerate lack a direct and explicit animosity toward the God of the Bible,

they're still his enemies. They're still part of the kingdom of this world, following the ways of Satan. They still reject God's goodness and oppose his authority. And God still condemns them.

Now that we've considered humanity's present state from the perspective of the unregenerate, let's turn our attention to the regenerate.

REGENERATE

You'll recall that the technical term "regenerate" means recreated or reborn. In other words, the regenerate are those who have been born again through the work of the Holy Spirit. When that happens, our spirits are regenerated or given new life.

We'll explore the characteristics of the regenerate in three ways that correspond to our discussion of the unregenerate. First, we'll see that they have spiritual life. Second, we'll explain their moral ability. And third, we'll focus on their reconciliation to God. Let's look first at their spiritual life.

Spiritual Life

The Bible teaches that all human beings are born into a state of spiritual death. So, in order for us to be regenerate — to have spiritual life — our souls have to pass from death into life. We might think of this as a kind of spiritual resurrection. This principle is clearly taught in places like John 5:24, Ephesians 2:4, 5 and Colossians 2:13.

Scripture also describes this process in terms of rebirth. Human beings are first born when they receive physical life. But in order for us to receive God's blessings, like salvation, we have to undergo a second birth — a spiritual one.

The idea that we need spiritual life in order to inherit God's blessings isn't complicated. But even Nicodemus, a Pharisee and teacher of Israel, struggled to understand it. So, in John 3:3-6, Jesus explained it this way to Nicodemus:

No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again... [N]o one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit (John 3:3-6).

Here, Jesus taught that we can only have spiritual life if the Holy Spirit gives birth to our spirits. And Paul said something similar in Titus 3:5 when he wrote:

[God] saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

In some translations, the word "rebirth" here is actually rendered "regeneration."

Another important point to make about our spiritual life is that it's everlasting, or, as some translations put it, "eternal." When the Holy Spirit regenerates us, our souls pass from death to life. And that life never ends. Even when our earthly bodies die, our souls will live forever.

Eternal life is one of those wonderful, wonderful concepts that every Christian hears about, knows about, and should believe in. When it begins is always an interesting question, because I think a lot of people think of eternal life as that which happens to us after we've died, that goes on and on forever. And, of course, it is that, but the Scriptures say that we *have* eternal life when we come to faith in Christ, that it begins at that point when we are born again, when God regenerates us. And from that point onwards, we belong to God, we live for God, we glorify God, and he is our protector and our keeper. From that point onwards, no one will ever snatch us out of the Father's hand. So, eternal life ends up being not just about how long does it go on and not just about perfection, but it is about the quality of life, life under the Lord, life lived for the Lord and with the Lord, both now and eventually in the new heavens and the new earth.

— Dr. Paul Gardner

We often think of eternal life as something we gain after we die. And there's an important sense in which our everlasting life won't begin in all its fullness until our bodies are resurrected. But the Scriptures still speak of eternal life as a blessing that the regenerate already enjoy in our present state. John 10:28, 1 Timothy 6:12, and 1 John 5:11-13 all teach that the regenerate already possess everlasting spiritual life.

With the spiritual life of the regenerate in mind, let's consider their restored moral ability.

Moral Ability

Not surprisingly, the term “moral ability” refers to:

the capacity to please God and merit his blessings.

We'll say more about this in a moment, particularly with regard to merit. At this point, we'll just say that our moral ability does not enable us to *earn* our salvation — things like forgiveness, righteousness and eternal life are free gifts from God, based only on Christ's merit. But our restored moral ability does empower us to obey God's will and to pursue the blessings of his kingdom.

You'll remember that, according to Augustine, when humanity fell into sin, we moved from the state of *posse non peccare*, or the ability not to sin, into the state of *non posse non peccare*, or the inability not to sin. But Augustine also taught that when the Holy Spirit regenerates our souls, giving us spiritual life, he revitalizes our moral ability. He moves us back into a state of *posse non peccare*. In other words, the regenerate regain the ability to avoid sin and to please God. Listen to what Paul said in Ephesians 2:4-5:

God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:4-5).

And then in verse 10 he stated:

We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

The fact that God prepares good works for the regenerate proves that we've regained our moral ability. Even so, regeneration and salvation are the result of grace. Our good works don't save us.

Now, when the Holy Spirit regenerates us, we need to understand that he doesn't completely remove sin's corruption and influence from our lives. As Paul explained in Romans 7:14-25, the sin that lives in us still battles with the indwelling Holy Spirit. Scripture describes this struggle in terms of war in places like Romans 7:23, Galatians 5:17, and 1 Peter 2:11. But the good news is, the Spirit dwells in us and works in us. So, even though we continue to stumble because of sin's influence, we also do good works because of the Spirit's influence. As Paul put it in Philippians 2:13:

It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (Philippians 2:13).

So, if God takes the credit for the good works we do, where does merit come into the picture? Theologians have different views of this matter. On the one hand, all evangelical theologians agree that God can claim credit for the good works we do. This much is obvious from the passages we've read.

But on the other hand, some evangelical theologians say that those who are regenerate can claim a measure of merit, too. They point to the fact that God rewards our good works with heavenly treasures and crowns. As just a few examples, in Matthew 5:12, Jesus said that those who endure persecution will be rewarded. In Matthew 16:27, he said that in the last judgment each person will be rewarded "according to what he has done." And in 1 Corinthians 3:8, Paul said that eternal rewards will be distributed "according to [our] own labor."

There are some voices today that argue that there's a kind of pair of justifications. We're justified now as sinners because of what Christ has done on our behalf, bearing our guilt in his own body on the tree, but then at the end when God asks, as it were, "Why should I let you in here?" then you are justified at that stage partly on the basis of Christ's work and partly on the basis of how you have lived... But that's hugely troubling, because that means that the justification received in the first instance is not safe, it's not certain... So, that's troubling. On the other hand, you have to do something with this notion of reward because reward language is used quite a lot in the Bible. I think that there are several things that help clear the air just a wee bit. If we do good things that are consummated at the end in glory and reward, the question becomes, are those things the basis of our acceptance or not? ... So, it seems to me that Christian rewards in the

new heaven and the new earth are bound up with this consummation of the relationship that is already itself the fruit of grace, which is why Romans can speak of rewards being reckoned according to grace and so that our works don't become the basis, as if they have some independent contribution to make, but there is some connection between what we do and reward there out of the fullness of the grace of God in our lives that enables us to do certain things. But the ground of our acceptance before God is Christ's righteousness imputed to us and our sin imputed to him, and he's borne the whole and given the whole, and that is the *ground* of our acceptance before the living God on the last day.

— Dr. D.A. Carson

Regardless of how we answer the question about merit and rewards, all evangelicals agree that God has restored our moral ability, and he holds us accountable for doing good works. He calls us to imitate him, to love him, to love each other, and to keep his law. And he promises to reward us greatly when we do.

So far, we've examined the regenerate with regard to their spiritual life and moral ability. Now let's turn to their reconciliation to God.

Reconciliation to God

When God regenerates us, he also *adopts* us into his family. We were once enemies fighting against God on the side of Satan. But now God has made peace with us through Jesus. Through Christ's death our sins have been forgiven, and we've been brought into his household as heirs of his covenant promises.

As Paul wrote in Romans 5:10:

When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son (Romans 5:10).

And he said essentially the same thing in Colossians 1:21, 22.

In fact, we're not just children and heirs in God's household. Because we're united to his Son Jesus, we actually share Jesus' status as God's favored Son. In several places, Paul taught that, through saving faith, symbolized in baptism, we're united to Christ. So, when God looks at us, he sees us in Christ's shadow, and he credits Christ's perfections and righteousness to our account. In other words, he treats us as if we were Jesus himself: heir to Abraham and David, and perfectly keeping God's covenant. And because we're also united to Christ's death, God counts us as having already died for our sins, so that no punishment remains for us — only blessings. We see this in places like Romans 6:3, 4 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. And listen to Paul's words in Galatians 3:26-27:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (Galatians 3:26-27).

Beyond this, Paul actually taught that union with Christ — and the reconciliation it brings — is a fulfillment of God’s eschatological promises. As such, it’s proof that the new creation of the last days has begun. On this basis, we might even say that reconciliation to God is a foretaste of the eternal rewards we’ll receive when the new heavens and new earth come in all their fullness. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul wrote:

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (2 Corinthians 5:17, NRSV).

Some translations replace the phrase “there is a new creation” with “*he* is a new creation” or “*he* is a new creature.” But the Greek *kainē ktisis* is more naturally rendered “*there* is a new creation.” This reading also makes better sense of the renewal Paul described. So, our union with Christ proves that the age to come has arrived. Listen to how Paul continued in verses 19-21:

In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them ... [W]e entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:19-21, NRSV).

Christ took our place on the cross, and was counted sinful in order to save us. And because he did that, his righteousness is now credited to us. This is what accomplishes our reconciliation. God sees us not only as innocent because we’re forgiven in Christ, but also as perfectly obedient — as obedient as Christ himself.

So far in our lesson on “The Living and the Dead,” we’ve seen what the Bible says about the present state of human life. Now let’s address our second major topic: the intermediate state.

INTERMEDIATE STATE

The “intermediate state” is a term used by theologians to describe the time between people’s deaths and the resurrection. So, there is an intermediate state both for believers and unbelievers, and heaven in its present state, hell in its present state — what’s sometimes called the “present heaven” and the “present hell” — the eternal, eventual hell will be the lake of fire, the eternal, eventual heaven will be on the new earth. So, intermediate state is not like halfway between heaven and hell; it’s heaven or hell as they are now prior to the resurrection. So, everybody goes to the intermediate state when they die. The intermediate state ends for everyone at the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the unjust.

— Dr. Randy Alcorn

The intermediate state begins when we die and ends when Christ returns. It's called "intermediate" because it lies *between* our present state of bodily life on the current earth, and our future state of bodily life in the new heavens and new earth. It's a somewhat unusual state because, unlike in the other states, in the intermediate state our souls are separated from our bodies.

Our discussion of the intermediate state will divide into three parts. First, we'll address physical death. Second, we'll consider the fate of unregenerate souls. And third, we'll examine the destiny of regenerate souls. Let's begin with the matter of physical death.

PHYSICAL DEATH

Physical death is a universal human experience, but it's also horribly unnatural. Why? Because our bodies weren't created to die; they were designed to last forever. That's one of the reasons death is so tragic and so traumatic. It shatters our existence. It rips us out of the earthly creation we were designed to inhabit. It ruptures our relationships, separating us from our families and loved ones. And for those that are left behind, it hurts — badly. It's no wonder that Scripture calls physical death our "enemy."

Many scientists teach that physical death is the cessation of cellular activity. When the cells in our body stop working, we are dead. And this view is true, as far as it goes. But the theological aspects of physical death are far more significant. Like spiritual death, physical death is part of the curse God laid on humanity because of Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden. You'll recall that in Genesis 2:17, God told Adam:

You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die (Genesis 2:17).

When Adam ate the forbidden fruit, he fell under God's curse. God graciously delayed Adam's physical death, so that Adam didn't die immediately. But he didn't lift the curse entirely, and Adam's body eventually died. And just as Adam's sin spread *spiritual* death to the entire human race, it also spread *physical* death to us. Paul talked extensively about this problem in Romans 5. Listen to these examples from Romans 5:12-17:

Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men ... [T]he many died by the trespass of the one man ... [B]y the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man (Romans 5:12-17).

When we die, our souls are separated from our bodies, and our bodies are left to decay and return to dust. As we learn in Genesis 2:7, God created Adam from the dust of the ground. And when God cursed Adam in Genesis 3:19, he explicitly said that Adam

had been created from the ground and would, therefore, return to the ground. He had been made from dust and would become dust again.

Now, Christians are sometimes tempted to think that because our bodies don't go with us to heaven when we die, they really aren't that important. But Scripture demonstrates that our bodies are still part of us, even after we die. The most obvious examples of this are resurrections. Consider the widow's son that Elijah raised from the dead in 1 Kings 17:20-22, or Jesus' friend Lazarus whom the Lord raised from the dead in John 11:43, 44. Before they were raised, their bodies were still referred to and treated as the people they were in life. There's no suggestion that their bodies were merely shells shed by their spirits. And everyone viewed their resurrections as blessings, because significant parts of these people — their bodies — had been returned to life.

So, what happens when we die, right? If you believe there's an intermediate state that we are present with God outside of our bodies when we die, it might be easy to think that our bodies are no longer a part of us, because aren't *we* somewhere with God and then our body, which is no longer part of us, that's in the grave? But the reason that we would be mistaken to think about that is, one, God created us as whole persons. So, this separation is actually a tragic result that happens with the Fall, as John Cooper puts it. And the fact is, though, is that that separation that happens... While the good thing is apart from, after death, people are still experiencing God's presence, but, you know, we're made to be embodied, and because we're made to be embodied, and because Christ is raised in a body, then what that says to us is, well, even though there is this tragic separation, that's still *our* body in the grave, that's still part of us, and in the last day, I mean, *that body* is going to be raised.

— Vincent Bacote, Ph.D.

When our bodies die, we aren't whole anymore. For those who are saved, that means we can't do the things God created us to do, like filling and subduing the earth. Yes, heaven will be wonderful for our souls. But physical death is still a tremendous loss that should push us to hope for restoration in the future. And for the unsaved, it's an unmitigated catastrophe. It takes them from bad to worse, and gives them a foretaste of even greater suffering in the future.

Now that we've described physical death as the start of the intermediate state, we're ready to consider the experiences of unregenerate souls.

UNREGENERATE SOULS

As we saw in our discussion of spiritual death, when our souls die they don't cease to exist. They don't even cease to be conscious. And the same thing is true when our souls are separated from our bodies by physical death. Our souls continue to exist, think, and feel even after our bodies die.

We read in Ecclesiastes 12:7:

The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

For the unregenerate, the fact that their souls continue to exist should cause great fear, because when their spirit returns to God who gave it, it's not to enjoy his blessings. It's to begin suffering their just punishment in hell. As Jesus taught in Luke 12:4-5:

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more... Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell (Luke 12:4-5).

I believe that people should believe in hell for two reasons. The first reason is that Jesus Christ spoke many times about hell. For example ... [he said] that people should not fear the one who can kill the body and nothing else. But we should fear the one who can kill the body and also throw the soul into hell. In addition, the church needs to believe, trust in this, and preach about hell — speaking firmly, but in love — so that men can understand their condition before God so they won't be eternally condemned.

— Rev. José Aristides, translation

Scripture uses many different words that theologians and translators include in the generic term “hell.” For example, the Hebrew word *Sheol*, or “SHEE-ohl” in English, is used in a variety of ways throughout the Old Testament, including, in Psalm 9:17, as a reference to the home of unregenerate souls. The Old Testament also uses *Abaddon*, or “uh-BAD-n” in English, which means “destruction,” in places like Job 26:6 and Proverbs 15:11. And *bowr*, or “pit” in English, refers to a place of punishment in Isaiah 14:15-19.

The New Testament also has a variety of terms for the place souls are held during the intermediate state. For instance, the Greek word *Hades*, or “Hey-deez” in English, is used in several ways, including as a place of punishment in Luke 10:15. *Abussos* or abyss, generally refers to a prison for demons, as in Luke 8:31 and Revelation 9:1-11. But in Romans 10:7, Paul also used it to refer to a place for human souls, including Jesus' righteous soul.

The word “*geenna*” or Gehenna, however, universally identifies a place of fiery punishment, torment and destruction. It's mentioned in many passages, including Matthew 5:22, and Mark 9:43. Gehenna is often described as bodily suffering, which associates it with the final state, rather than with the intermediate state. But James 3:6 indicates that Gehenna is already in use, suggesting that it's where unregenerate souls go during the intermediate state.

The clearest picture we get of how unregenerate souls experience the intermediate state comes from Luke 16:19-31. In this passage, Jesus described a rich man who died

and was immediately tormented in Hades. Listen to Luke 16:23-25 and this description of Hades:

In hell, where [the rich man] was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, “Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.” But Abraham replied, “Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony” (Luke 16:23-25).

The Bible doesn’t make it clear whether Jesus’ account of Hades is an historical account or a parable. But the distinction isn’t terribly relevant to our investigation of the intermediate state. After all, the warning this account offers would be meaningless if the torments it describes weren’t real.

People ask the question, what happens to people who do not believe in Christ when they die? And the answer is given in several places in the New Testament, but one of the most detailed is in Luke 16, where Jesus gives a parable, but it’s a parable that realistically depicts what the afterlife is like for both believers and unbelievers. The unbeliever, who’s the rich man, he goes and is in torment. That’s right after he’s died. He’s already being punished because he has rebelled against God and his — of course, apart from Christ — his sins are unpaid for. And so, he is depicted as being in suffering, but that is ... a state that’s prior to the final judgment when Christ returns.

— Dr. Vern S. Poythress

Having explored the intermediate state with regard to physical death and unregenerate souls, let’s turn our attention to regenerate souls.

REGENERATE SOULS

Obviously, regenerate souls continue to exist just like unregenerate souls do. But their experience is far different. Whereas unregenerate souls suffer a foretaste of their final punishment, regenerate souls enjoy a foretaste of their final blessings.

We’ll mention just three experiences regenerate souls have during the intermediate state, beginning with the fact that they’re in the Lord’s presence in heaven.

Lord’s presence

In several places, biblical writers and characters expressed their belief that when the regenerate die, their souls are immediately taken into God’s presence in heaven. For

example, in Luke 23:43, Jesus told the penitent thief on the cross that *that very day* they would be together in paradise. Revelation 6:9 speaks of the souls of the martyrs being close to the altar in God's heavenly tabernacle. And Paul looked forward to physical death as the time that his soul would depart to be with Jesus. Listen to what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:8:

We ... would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8).

And in Philippians 1:23, he said:

I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far (Philippians 1:23).

What happens to believers at death? Well, here is Jesus the night before he dies... He's surrounded by this little group of disciples; they're mourning. These are some of his last words, and he tells them about the future. The first thing he says is this ... So, "I'm going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I'll come back and take you to be with me, to where I am going." So as the believer dies, Jesus says, "I'll come to that believer and say, 'Come on, let's go. It's time to go.' And I will escort you to the Father's house" ... It's an amazing thing. He's the escort. But he's not just the escort. He's the destination. "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place, I'll come back and take you to be with me that you may come to where I am." So, he doesn't just escort me to be there. He's the destination. "But how do we know the way?" says Thomas. He says, "I am the way. I am the truth. I am the light." So, he's the escort; he's the destination; he's the way. So, what happens to us after we die? Focus entirely on Jesus. He'll escort you there. He'll be the way there. He'll be the destination. And he prepares a place, of course, by dying for us. He's the one who enables us to get there by dying on the cross so that, actually, our sin is dealt with, and we can find our way to heaven through the cross.

— Rev. Rico Tice

When the regenerate die, their bodies rest in the grave, but their souls are immediately taken into the Lord's presence in heaven, where they remain until the last resurrection. We need to be clear here that the standard expression "in the grave" includes all who have died, regardless of whether or not their bodies were laid in physical graves.

Also, we should pause to mention that some Christians throughout history have taught a view called "soul sleep." This is the idea that God does *not* take our souls to heaven immediately when we die. Instead, our souls remain with our bodies, unconscious until Jesus returns. Supporters of this view appeal to passages like Daniel 12:2, and 1 Corinthians 15:51, which refer to the dead as if they're sleeping.

But this view is inconsistent with Scripture. As we've seen, Jesus, Paul and others believed they would enjoy each other's presence in heaven immediately upon their deaths. And the Bible teaches that the martyrs are already there and fully conscious. Simply put, when the Bible speaks of the dead "sleeping," this is best understood as a euphemism — a gentle, metaphorical way of talking about death. Jesus himself spoke this way regarding Lazarus' death in John 11:11-14, when he said that Lazarus had "fallen asleep." Modern Christians use similar euphemisms when we say that the dead have "passed on," "departed," or "gone to be with the Lord."

A second experience regenerate souls have during the intermediate state is fellowship with other regenerate souls in heaven.

Fellowship

Revelation 6:9, 10 indicates that the martyrs in heaven know and fellowship with each other. And they speak together with one voice as they appeal to God to hasten the final judgment.

And in the Gospels, when Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James, and John, he appeared with Moses and Elijah, who spoke with him and with each other. We read about this in Matthew 17:3, Mark 9:4, and especially Luke 9:30, 31.

In Jesus' account of Abraham and the rich man, the soul of a poor man named Lazarus is being comforted by Abraham. Moreover, in Luke 16:26, Abraham says that there is a great chasm that separates the regenerate souls from the unregenerate souls. This suggests that Abraham and Lazarus aren't alone on their side of the chasm, but are in the fellowship of all the other regenerate souls.

And Hebrews 12:22, 23 speaks of a heavenly assembly of "the spirits of righteous men made perfect." In the context of Hebrews 11:40, this assembly includes every regenerate person that has experienced physical death.

The third experience of regenerate souls during the intermediate state we'll mention is that they reach perfect holiness.

Perfect holiness

When we speak of human holiness in this context, we have in mind both moral purity; and acceptability in God's presence. When our souls are separated from our bodies by physical death, sin loses its hold on us, and we eagerly avoid all sin from that point on.

You'll recall Augustine's teaching that when humanity fell into sin, we moved from the state of *posse non peccare*, or the ability not to sin, into the state of *non posse non peccare*, or the inability not to sin. You'll also remember that, according to Augustine, when the Holy Spirit regenerates our souls, he moves us back into a state of *posse non peccare*, restoring our moral ability. Augustine also taught that in the final state, we'll reach the condition of *non posse peccare*, which is Latin for the inability to sin. But what about the intermediate state? When do we lose the ability to sin? Scripture

suggests that we actually lose the ability to sin when we enter the intermediate state. This is what Hebrews 12:23 has in mind when it refers to:

... the spirits of righteous men made perfect (Hebrews 12:23).

Regenerate souls become perfect in the intermediate state because they're no longer corrupted by sin, and they're received into God's immediate presence. As the answer to the Westminster Shorter Catechism's question 37 puts it:

The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory.

To support this idea, the catechism points to 2 Corinthians 5:1, 6 and 8; Philippians 1:23; and Luke 23:43. Each of these passages indicates that as soon as the regenerate die, they are immediately taken to heaven.

But why is physical death the event that frees us from sin's corruption and influence? The English theologian John Owen, who lived from 1616 to 1683, offered insight into this question. He argued that while sin indwells our hearts, it uses our bodies to fight against our souls. As Owen wrote in chapter 6 of *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of Indwelling Sin in Believers*:

Peter shows what [sinful desires] oppose and fight against, — namely, the “soul” and the law of grace therein; James what they fight with or by, — namely, the “members,” or the corruption that is in our mortal bodies.

Here, Owen referred to 1 Peter 2:11 and James 4:1, and concluded that our physical bodies are the weapons sin uses to push us toward sin.

The apostle Paul argued similarly in Romans 6:12, where he wrote:

Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires (Romans 6:12).

And in Romans 7:22-23 he added:

In my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members (Romans 7:22-23).

When the regenerate die, indwelling sin can no longer use our bodies to push us toward sin. As Owen wrote in *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, chapter 2:

Indwelling sin always abides whilst we are in this world ... We have a “body of death” ... from whence we are not delivered but by the death of our bodies.

God created us to live forever on earth. And that means that death is only a temporary setback for those who trust in Christ. Yes, it's traumatic, and it causes us tremendous grief. But we don't grieve as those who have no hope. In the short term, our hope is that the intermediate state will free us from suffering and sin, and allow us to live with Christ in heaven until the resurrection. So, we can face death without fear, trusting that God will end our suffering and shower us with indescribable blessings in heaven.

Our lesson on "The Living and the Dead" has so far addressed the present state of human life, and the intermediate state that begins when we die. So, now we're ready to turn to our third major topic: the final state of humanity when the eschaton is consummated.

FINAL STATE

In a prior lesson, we divided the eschaton, or last days, into three stages: The inauguration spanned Jesus' life and earthly ministry, including the foundational work done by the first century apostles and prophets. During the inauguration, the age to come, characterized by God's blessings for his faithful people, began to overlap with this age, characterized by sin, suffering and death.

The second stage is the continuation, which began immediately after the inauguration. This is the period we live in now, so it's also the period covered by the present state and intermediate state of individual eschatology. During this stage, we feel the tension of coexisting in this age and the age to come.

And the third stage is the consummation, which will completely end this age, and permanently replace it with the age to come. With regard to individual eschatology, the consummation is the stage when all human beings simultaneously reach their final state.

We'll divide our discussion of the final state into three parts. First, we'll address the physical resurrection of the dead. Second, we'll describe the fate of the unregenerate. And third, we'll explore the fate of the regenerate. Let's look first at the physical resurrection of the dead.

PHYSICAL RESURRECTION

When God created humanity, he gave us bodies and souls. During the intermediate state, our bodies are temporarily separated from our souls. But when the final state begins, the bodies of everyone that has ever died will be resurrected, so that we can all face God's final judgment as whole persons. This event is often called the "general resurrection" because it includes everyone that has ever died, whether regenerate or unregenerate.

The general resurrection is taught clearly in both the Old and New Testaments. And Hebrews 6:1, 2 asserts that it's one of the most basic doctrines that every Christian should affirm.

The general resurrection of the dead is important because, as Paul says in Acts 17, God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world, and he's given us evidence of this by raising Christ from the dead. That judgment is of whole people, and the general resurrection is about affirming the fact that we are whole people, that we will stand before God as whole people. And what this does is not only affirm the fact that we are going to be judged in the bodies in which we lived, sinned, believed, but also that we are going to spend eternity as whole people. This is important not only from the standpoint of the way we view eschatology, but it's also important from the standpoint of the way we view one another and the inherent dignity and value of every human being, because we're made in the image of God.

— Dr. Voddie Baucham, Jr.

In the Old Testament, the prophets taught that the physical bodies that had once died and returned to dust would rise again from the dust. And they would rise in order to face divine judgment. Daniel 12:2 says:

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

And Isaiah 26:19-21 prophesies:

Your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy... [T]he earth will give birth to her dead... See, the Lord is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins (Isaiah 26:19-21).

Other Old Testament passages like Psalm 49:7-15, Psalm 73:24-28, and Job 19:25-27 also indicate a resurrection unto judgment.

In the New Testament, Jesus confirmed the general resurrection multiple times. For example, in Matthew 22:31, 32 and Luke 20:35-38, he called God, “the God of Abraham ... Isaac and ... Jacob,” saying that God was “not the God of the dead but of the living.” And listen to what Jesus said in John 5:28-29:

A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear [the Son of Man's] voice and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned (John 5:28-29).

Like the Old Testament, Jesus said that all the dead will rise at the general resurrection in order to face God's judgment. And other reliable New Testament characters believed the same thing, including Martha in John 11:24, and the apostles in Acts 4:2. The apostle Paul also argued for the general resurrection in Acts 17:32, 23:6, and 24:21, as well as in his own writings in 1 Corinthians 15:12-42.

The New Testament teaches that the general resurrection will take place at the judgment throne of God, or at least that's where all humanity will be brought after having been raised. Listen to the apostle John's vision in Revelation 20:11-13:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it... The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done (Revelation 20:11-13).

The last detail of the general resurrection we should mention is what happens to those that are still alive when judgment day arrives. Like those that have been resurrected, those that are still alive will also be judged. First Corinthians 15:51, 52 mentions this fact with specific reference to the regenerate. But it applies equally to all people everywhere. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:9-10:

We make it our goal to please [the Lord], whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:9-10).

At the consummation, the dead will rise, and join those who remain alive, before the judgment throne of God. And he will judge all of us according to our works. Those who have been unfaithful to him will be condemned for their sins and receive eternal punishment. But those who have been faithful — those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and justified in Christ — will receive an everlasting reward.

Now that we've seen that the final state begins with the physical resurrection of the dead, let's address the fate of the unregenerate.

UNREGENERATE

As we've seen, all fallen human beings deserve punishment because of Adam's sin. But beyond this, we're guilty of our own sins as well. As a result, God would be justified in condemning all of us. But because of his great mercy, he saves some. Sadly, but justly, those that aren't saved suffer the appropriate punishment for their sins. As Jesus himself said in Matthew 16:27:

For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done (Matthew 16:27, ESV).

The word translated "repay" here comes from the Greek word, "*apodidómi*" (*ἀποδίδωμι*). Some translations render this word "reward." But Jesus was clear that the "reward" here refers to both punishments and blessings "according to what [each person] has done." This same idea is clear throughout Scripture, including in Mark 9:43-47, John 5:29, 2 Corinthians 5:10, and 2 Peter 2:4-9.

Earlier, we mentioned several different terms that Scripture uses for hell. The New Testament descriptions of hell typically fall into one of two categories, referring to hell as a place of darkness, or as a place of fire.

With regard to its darkness, Scripture calls hell “*to skotos to exōteron*” meaning “the outer darkness” or simply “the darkness.” We see this in places like Matthew 8:12, 22:13 and 25:30. It’s also referred to as “*ho zophos tou skotous*,” meaning “blackest darkness” in Jude 13.

This darkness is significant because it implies that God doesn’t manifest his glorious, gracious presence in hell. Revelation 21:23, 24 teaches that in the New Jerusalem, the light of God’s glory will fill the entire city. But the wicked in hell will be shut out from this light. They will be eternally separated from the glories of God’s kindness, favor, and mercy. As Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 1:9:

They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

That’s not to say that God isn’t present in hell. After all, he’s omnipresent, meaning he is present everywhere all the time. But in hell, he’s present as the jailor and punisher, not as a gracious, glorious Savior.

You hear a lot of people say that God is not present in hell because the apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 1 describes how it is being away from the presence of the Lord. And yet, of course God is present in hell because God is present in all places. He’s present there in his wrath. People have this idea if they go to hell, oh, what a good time they’re going to have, and it will just be like at the neighborhood bar, and they’ll be doing what they want. In fact, it will be the active wrath of God. He will be absent in his grace, in his favor. You think of the great Aaronic blessing: “The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you.” There will be none of that in hell. It will be the turned-away face of God; they will be conscious of the curse of God, the alienation that they have from God, the wrath of God. Think of our Lord Jesus on the cross. There’s a good place for us to go to look at this. “Why have you forsaken me?” God was upon his Son in his wrath on the cross. And so, when people say that God is not present in hell, some of those connotations are necessary. God’s favor, God’s goodness, God’s love, all of these things are completely absent. That’s what Paul’s talking about... But the wrath of God, the terror of God the awareness of the beauty and the holiness of the God they have spurned, but to which they have no access eternally, these things will be very present in hell. It will be the curse and the wrath of God forever and ever.

— Dr. Richard Phillips

In addition to describing hell as a place of darkness, Scripture says that hell is a place of fire. It's called: "eternal fire" in Jude 7; the "lake of fire" in Revelation 20:14, 15; and a "fiery furnace" in Matthew 13:50. And as we saw earlier, it's also referred to as *geenna* or Gehenna — a place of fiery punishment, torment and destruction. The name Gehenna identifies the Valley of Hinnom, where apostate Israelites burned their children in sacrifice to false gods. Second Chronicles 28:3 tells us that King Ahaz sacrificed his children there. And 2 Chronicles 33:6 reports that King Manasseh did, too. Clearly this earthly valley is just a metaphor for the real hell. Even so, it points to the kind of torment the wicked suffer there.

But perhaps the most frightening thing we can say about hell is that it will never end. As Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, the wicked "will be punished with everlasting destruction." Jesus made the same point in Matthew 25:41, where he referred to hell as "eternal fire," and in Matthew 25:46, where he talked about "eternal punishment." In the same way, Hebrews 6:2 calls hell "eternal judgment."

The idea of eternal torment in a lake of fire should terrify anyone. It should motivate us to run to God begging for mercy in Christ. And when we think of our unsaved family and friends spending eternity in such torment, it can cause us to wonder how a loving God could inflict such severe punishment on people he created. Do their sins really warrant such a terrible fate?

One of the most difficult questions that we'll ever have to answer as a pastor is, how could a loving God send anyone, even his enemies, to eternal damnation or to hell? And I think the answer lies within an understanding of God's holiness. I don't think that most people understand just how holy God is, and in turn just how sinful we are. We have a very limited view of God's holiness, and so we don't understand that when we've offended or sinned against an infinitely holy God, then we deserve an infinite punishment. When you really play that out it actually makes a lot of sense, but I think the fact that God is so incredibly holy and that in turn, we're so incredibly sinful that his wrath justifiably could be poured out on mankind because of that holiness... If the gap between his holiness and our sinfulness were not that great, if the chasm were not that wide, then God could have just said, "Hey, I forgive you of your sins. Go on about your business," and nobody would go to hell. But, there's the cross of Jesus. He poured out his wrath on Jesus at the cross. That seems pretty severe if there's no hell and if there's no gap between God's holiness and our unrighteousness. And so, the good news is, though, that anyone can avoid the wrath of God because of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. And so, I think the question is not, why would a loving God send people to hell, but how in the world could a loving God allow any of us to go to heaven? And he did it through Jesus. And the only way we'll ever get to the bottom of that is when we understand just how holy he is and just how sinful we are.

— Dr. Matt Carter

As harsh as it may sound, the wicked deserve their punishment in hell. And although we may weep for their suffering because we love them, we can never count it to be unjust or undeserved.

Having looked at the final state with regard to physical resurrection and the punishment of the unregenerate, let's focus on the final blessings the regenerate receive.

REGENERATE

For the regenerate, the final state will be wonderful. Death will *not* be able to hold us. After our bodies have been raised from the dead, the Lord will render his final judgments. And for us, those judgments will bring only blessings. In Christ, we are perfect. And God's judgments will reflect that. We don't know *exactly* what it will be like. But the details Scripture gives us are more than sufficient to convince us that our final state will surpass our greatest dreams.

We'll consider three aspects of the final state the regenerate will enjoy, beginning with the fact that we'll have perfect bodies.

Perfect bodies

We've already seen that our bodies will be resurrected for the final judgment. But it's encouraging to understand what our bodies will be like then. In the intermediate state, our regenerate souls are perfected in holiness, but our bodies decay in the grave. So, in this sense, our salvation isn't complete during the intermediate state. But it is complete in the final state because, as Paul said in Romans 8:23, that's when our bodies are redeemed. Our souls are regenerated in the present state, and will be free from corruption in the intermediate state. But our bodies have to wait for the final state for their renewal and perfection. Theologians often refer to this as our "glorification," because we'll finally be able to reflect God's glory in the way he intended from the beginning.

But what exactly will our glorified bodies be like? In 1 Corinthians 15:52-54, Paul described them as "imperishable" and "immortal," meaning we'll no longer get sick, or be infirm, or die. And listen to what Paul wrote in Philippians 3:21:

[Jesus Christ] will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:21).

As incredible as it may seem, the New Testament reports that Jesus' resurrected body was physical and substantive. For example, he was able to eat in Luke 24:30-43. And Thomas was able to touch Jesus' side where it had been pierced, as we see in John 20:27.

But Jesus' resurrected body was also different from his body that died. He was able to appear suddenly to his apostles in Luke 24:36, and to vanish suddenly from their presence in Luke 24:31. Similarly, he appeared in rooms without having to enter in

John 20:19, 26. Paul addressed these differences in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, where he wrote this description:

The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

Paul compared the bodies we bury to seeds that grow into plants. And his point was, there is continuity between our natural body and our spiritual body — one turns into the other. But the spiritual body has lost the corruption of the natural body, and gained glorious new attributes for eternal life.

I would like to clear up a very important misunderstanding about the nature of our resurrected and glorified bodies. It's based on a confused interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15. I have encountered many believers who read Paul's phrase "spiritual body" and assume from that that the resurrection body will be immaterial, that it will be nonphysical. And that's not actually what Paul is teaching. There are two different terms for "spiritual" in New Testament Greek: one that means "made of" or "composed of" spirit, and the other that means "adapted" to the spirit. And it's this latter term that Paul uses here. He's not saying that our resurrection, glorified bodies will be *made of* spirit, but that they will be perfectly adapted to the spirit. What does he mean by that? Well, right now our physical bodies suffer the consequences and corruption of the Fall, and although we have been spiritually renewed, this body still has sinful longings. It wants to pursue pleasures that are forbidden, and so forth. And as long as we are in this body, we suffer that battle between flesh and spirit that Paul so frequently describes... But in the resurrection and glorification, the bodies that we receive will be perfectly adapted to the Spirit's control. All traces of our corruption will be removed from the physical body so that this battle that we're constantly engaged in now will at last be over. I long for that day.

— Dr. Charles L. Quarles

The second aspect of the final state of the regenerate that we'll mention is we'll live in the new heavens and new earth.

New heavens and new earth

Many of us are content to learn that our souls will go to heaven when we die. But as we've seen, this is only our *intermediate* state. We only receive partial blessings in heaven, since our bodies remain in the grave. We'll receive our full and complete

blessings when we live *bodily* in the new heavens and new earth. This has always been the hope of God's people, ever since Adam and Eve corrupted the present creation.

In Genesis 3:17-19, God cursed the earth because of Adam's sin. But in verse 15 of that same chapter, God indicated that when the Redeemer came, he would reverse the effects of the curse. The prophet Isaiah made this hope explicit in Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22, when he referred to the consummation of God's earthly kingdom as "new heavens and a new earth." The apostle Peter confirmed this hope in 2 Peter 3:13. And the apostle John foresaw it's coming in his apocalyptic vision recorded in the book of Revelation. In Revelation 21:1, John reported:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away (Revelation 21:1).

John's description of a new heaven and new earth continues through 22:5.

In the new heavens and new earth, God's curse on the earth will be completely removed. The ground will no longer cause us trouble, and we'll enjoy and tend God's perfected kingdom with ease. And more importantly, God will be present with us in a visible way. Revelation 21:22, 23 teach that his glory will light the New Jerusalem. And Revelation 21:3–22:4 ensures us that God himself will reign from his throne in that holy city.

The third detail we'll mention about our regenerate lives in the final state is that we'll receive everlasting rewards.

Rewards

The regenerate will be rewarded for what Christ has done on their behalf, for their faithfulness, and for the good they have done in obedience to God. For instance, in 2 Timothy 4:8, Paul mentioned a "crown of righteousness." And in 1 Peter 5:4, Peter spoke of a "crown of glory." In 2 Timothy 2:12, Paul also said that we would reign with Christ. Hebrews 4:1-11 says that we'll enter God's final "Sabbath rest." And in several places, Jesus spoke of storing up our treasure in heaven, including Matthew 6:20, Mark 10:21, and Luke 12:33.

We honestly don't know what these rewards and treasures will be. But we know the gracious character of our loving God, and we can trust that whatever he has planned for us will lead to our great enjoyment of him forever.

CONCLUSION

In this lesson, we've explored the various states of "The Living and the Dead" in individual eschatology. We've considered the present state of the unregenerate and the regenerate. We've described the intermediate state in terms of the universality of physical death, and the subsequent experiences of the unregenerate and the regenerate. And we've

looked at the final state of humanity beginning with physical resurrection, and continuing with the ultimate destinies of the unregenerate and the regenerate.

Studying individual eschatology is important because it reminds us that our lives in this fallen world have everlasting consequences. For those of us that receive salvation, we're guaranteed to be blessed beyond measure in the intermediate state, and even beyond that in the final state. But those that reject Christ have no hope in the next world. Far from causing us to gloat over our good fortune, those facts should inspire us to preach the gospel, so that as many as possible might share our everlasting joy and fellowship in the new heavens and the new earth.

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GLOSSARY

abaddon – Hebrew term (transliteration) that means “destruction”; sometimes used as a synonym for hell

abussos – Greek term (transliteration) for “abyss”; generally refers to a prison for demons, but can also refer to a place for human souls

apodidómi – Greek term (transliteration) for “to repay” or “to reward”

Augustine – (A.D. 354-430) Bishop of Hippo who believed in the Scriptures as our final authority in doctrine and considered the creeds of the church to be helpful summaries of scriptural teaching; wrote numerous works that continue to influence the church today

bowr – Hebrew term (transliteration) for “pit”

consummation – Third and final stage of inaugurated eschatology when Christ will return and fulfill God's ultimate purpose for all of history

continuation – Second or middle stage of inaugurated eschatology; the period of the kingdom of God after Christ's first advent but before the final victory

covenant – A binding legal agreement made between two people or groups of people, or between God and a person or group of people

eschatology – The study or doctrine of the last days

eschaton – The last stage of world history; the last or latter days

eschatos – Greek term (transliteration) meaning “last,” “end,” “final”

eternal life – To know God and live forever in the full blessing of God

Gehenna – A place of fiery punishment, torment and destruction

general resurrection – The resurrection of all people in order to face God's final judgment when Christ returns in glory

glorification – The final stage of our salvation, when we receive a perfect eternal body and fully become what we were meant to be, having complete victory over sin and death

Hades – Greek term (transliteration) used in the New Testament, usually meaning the abode of wicked souls, but sometimes referring to the place of both the righteous and the wicked

inauguration – First stage in inaugurated eschatology; refers to Christ's first coming and the ministries of his apostles and prophets

individual eschatology – The study of how individual human beings experience the events of the last days

intermediate state – The state between our lives on earth now and the lives we will have in the resurrection

moral ability – The capacity to please God and merit his blessings

moral inability – No capacity to please God or merit his blessings

non posse non peccare – Latin phrase meaning “the inability not to sin”; used by Augustine to describe humanity's condition after the Fall

non posse peccare – Latin phrase meaning “the inability to sin”; used by Augustine to describe redeemed humanity’s condition in our final state

Owen, John – (1616-1683) English theologian, pastor and author of numerous important theological works

posse non peccare – Latin phrase meaning “the ability not to sin”; used by Augustine to describe humanity’s condition before the Fall and after the Holy Spirit has regenerated our souls

regenerate – Term used in theology to mean reborn, recreated, spiritually alive

Sheol – Hebrew term (transliteration) used in the Old Testament to refer to the place of departed spirits, both the righteous and the wicked

soul – The immortal, immaterial part of a human being; all the inner, non-physical aspects of our being

soul sleep – A view of physical death in which our souls remain with our bodies, unconscious until Jesus returns (inconsistent with Scripture)

unregenerate – Term used in theology to mean not reborn, not recreated, spiritually dead

Westminster Shorter Catechism – A traditional Protestant summary of Christian teaching, originally published in 1647