

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: June 29, 2014

What Happens When We Die?

by Dan Trygg

“For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven; ³ inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked. ⁴ For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. ⁶ Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord-- ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight-- 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. ⁹ Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

My brother passed away last week. He had been in a wheelchair for nearly 36 years, and had suffered from painful infections for the past six months. **When the Lord called him home, it was an escape from the pain and limitations of his broken earthly body. He was brought into the presence of the Lord, and was able to enjoy unhindered fellowship with Him. For him, it was a good thing.** It was “graduation day”. He left behind his wife and family members, but he was gathered to his “forever family” in heaven. We will miss him, but **we rejoice for him, that he is being comforted and is at rest from his struggles.**

It has been interesting to hear people’s thoughts about this. **People have said, “Now he is running and dancing on the streets of gold!” No, he is not!** I mean, **I appreciate the sentiment, but it is not based in reality.** It is *not* what the Bible teaches about what happens when we die. **If I could state the obvious: He doesn’t have a body, right now! The resurrection doesn’t happen until Jesus returns, remember? Then, the dead in Christ will be raised, and those of us believers who are alive at His return will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. When Jesus comes, the last trumpet will sound and the graves will open up, and the dead in Christ will be raised. Until that event takes place, the dead have no bodies.** Their spiritual essence has been separated from their mortal bodies at death, and is ushered into the presence of God Himself. **They are conscious, and can interact with God, and they are comforted, ...but they have to wait until the end of the age to receive new, glorified bodies.**

Peoples’ comments pull from some Biblical images, but they actually reflect more of a belief in a spiritual existence that is very much like our current earthly existence. It is closer to the Native American belief in a “happy hunting ground”, or the Egyptian view of the afterlife. Both of these belief systems thought of the afterlife as a place where the dead carry on with life pretty much as they knew it here. The difference is that **these are spiritual, non-corporeal existences.** It is an observed fact that *virtually every primitive culture has had a belief that people are immortal. Almost every culture also has a view of the afterlife. While many other religions describe an afterlife of physical pleasures and delights, the Biblical view is unique, in that it is centered around communion with God.* The righteous will *live with God* in His heavenly city on the new earth, ...while the wicked are *separated from God*, sent to a place removed from His goodness. **We are all accountable to God for how we live our lives.** We will have to give an account to Him, and we will be rewarded or suffer loss based upon our choices. **The Bible recognizes the conscious awareness of the spiritual essence (souls) of those who have died.** They do *not* just cease to exist, or sleep, as some would claim. **The Biblical teaching is unique in claiming that these spirits will be raised from the dead at Jesus’ return, or at the end of the age.**

The passage at the top of the page describes **three states of human existence.** (1.) **There is our earthly tent, a reference to our physical bodies** (cf. II Pet. 1:13,14); (2.) **a dwelling from heaven, which refers to the resurrected bodies; and, (3.) there is also a state described as being naked, or unclothed.** This is a reference to the **disembodied existence** that those who have departed experience now. They are conscious spirits without bodies (Rev. 6:9-11), ...with no way to feel, touch, see, hear or taste, ...no way to interact with the physical reality around them. **Paul says we would rather not be “unclothed”, but we would prefer for the mortal bodies to be “swallowed up by life”.** This is a reference to the resurrection, when we will be *changed, transformed* from our perishable physical bodies to put on our new, imperishable, glorified bodies. **Paul writes, “But someone will say, ‘How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?’”** ³⁶ You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; ³⁷ and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. ³⁸ But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. ...So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a *perishable* body, it is raised an *imperishable* body; ⁴³ it is sown in *dishonor*,

it is raised in *glory*; it is sown in *weakness*, it is raised in *power*; ⁴⁴ it is sown a *natural body*, it is raised a *spiritual body*. If there is a natural body, there *is* also a *spiritual body*. ⁴⁵ So also it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living soul.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸ As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. ⁴⁹ And just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. ⁵⁰ Now I say this, brethren, that **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.** ⁵¹ Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for **the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.** ⁵³ **For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality**” (1 Corinthians 15:35-38,42-53). Note that verse 51 refers to death as “sleep”. This is called phenomenological language. It describes things as they *appear*, even if we know better. Here, the dead *appear* to be asleep, though we know from other Bible passages, and the testimony of people who have died and were resuscitated, that they are conscious (e.g., Lk. 16:19-31; cf. Isa. 14:9-11).

What happens when we die? From Luke 16, we see that the righteous are carried away by the angels (cf. Psa. 91:11,12; Heb. 1:14). Paul says that **when Christians die, they “depart” and go to be with Christ, a state that is “far better”** (Phil. 1:23). Even though they leave their bodies, and have to experience the strange condition of being “unclothed” from their physical sensations and abilities, they are brought into the presence of Christ. **They are awake, conscious, and they find that to be in His presence in heaven is a far better experience than anything this life has to offer.** It is a time of *rest* (Rev. 6:11; 14:13; Dan. 12:13), *worship* (Rev. 7:15), *freedom from hunger, thirst or suffering*, and God *Himself* will *shelter* and *tenderly comfort* them, *wiping every tear from their eyes* (Rev. 7:16,17). **Because perishable flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, it is necessary for them to put off the perishable “earth suit” in order to come into God’s presence.** God dwells in *unapproachable light*, whom no human *has seen* or *can see* with these perishable bodies. Yahweh told Moses, “No man can see Me and live!” The radiance or glory of God’s absolute brilliance and holiness would *consume* any mortal flesh (Ex. 33:20; I Tim. 6:16; Deut. 4:24). As redeemed spirits, however, ...ones washed in the blood of Christ’s atoning death, made new and transformed by the Holy Spirit..., those who have been reborn in Christ *can* abide His holy presence, once the mortal flesh has slipped away. **Thus, Paul writes, “while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord. ...we prefer rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord”** (II Cor. 5:6,8).

It is important to see, however, that this is NOT the end. This is the “naked” or “unclothed” state Paul referred to. **The final goal, or end point, is the resurrection, when the unclothed soul is once again reunited with a body, ...a glorified, imperishable body just like Jesus had after His resurrection.** This is *not* available to us, *yet*. It comes at the end of the age, when Jesus Himself will return. **God has given us a sign of His promised full salvation,** however. It is called the “pledge” of our inheritance. The word means “an advance, a down payment, or earnest money given as a guarantee of contract”. Three times in the NT we are told that **God gave His people the Holy Spirit to be such a pledge to us that He will fully redeem us** (II Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14). **The fulfillment of this pledge comes when Jesus physically returns on the clouds with His angels, at the end of this age.** Paul depicts the scene in I Thessalonians 4:13-17, “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep (have died), that you may not grieve, as those who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ 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, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ 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 shall rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.” **When Jesus returns, then we will be resurrected from the dead, or taken up, and transformed into glorified, imperishable bodies.** “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. ⁵⁵ O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; ⁵⁷ but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” (1 Corinthians 15:54-57) **Then, when we receive those new bodies, ...then we will run, dance, sing and celebrate the Lord’s great goodness with a whole new ability and exuberance!**

This is the good news for those who trust in Christ. The prospects for those who reject God is not so positive. We all must face God to account for how we lived. **For those who live selfishly and reject God, the scriptures report that they, too, are conscious after death** (Lk. 16:19-28; Ezk. 32:19-21; Isa. 14:9-11; Ps. 49:14-19). **They, however, wait in torment for the final judgment, as they realize their fate.** *You* have a *choice*. Believe the good news. **Trust in God’s provision in Jesus Christ, and live for Him. He will lead you into life and victory.**