I. Why Do Christians Die?

a. Why do Christians die, even if their sins were paid for by Jesus?

i. And Christians still die. All of these are the results of living in a world that isn’t quite right, a world that isn’t fully free from the curse of sin.\(^1\)

ii. Paul tells us that although Christ defeated death when he rose from the dead, death will be the last result of sin to be removed from this fallen world: Christ “must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:25–26).\(^2\)

iii. God uses the experience of death to complete our sanctification. God uses death as a means to make us more like Christ.\(^3\)

iv. Even though God uses a hardship like death for a positive means in our life, it is important to remember that death is not merely “natural,” as people without God’s Word often think of it. Neither is sickness or evil or injustice natural. These things are not right, and in God’s world they ought not to be. Although we live with these things now, one day all of them—even death—will finally be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:24–26).\(^4\)

b. If there is no condemnation in Christ (Rom. 8:1), why does God still allow or bring pain and hardship into a Believer’s life?

i. In fact, in the Christian life generally it is not unusual for God to use hardship and pain to bring about good. Paul tells us in Romans 8:28, “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good.” Pain and hardship are often the results of God disciplining his children, “for the Lord disciplines the one he loves…. He disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Heb. 12:6, 10–11).\(^5\)

ii. Not all discipline serves to correct us when we have done wrong. Often, God’s discipline in our lives is a way of strengthening us; it is a means of sanctification. Although Jesus never sinned, he still “learned obedience through what he suffered” (Heb. 5:8) and was made “perfect through suffering” (Heb. 2:10). As he grew from childhood to adulthood and continued through his life on earth, the task of obedience to God became harder and harder, and it included much suffering. Through all of this, Jesus increased in his strength to obey.\(^6\)

\(^1\) Wayne A. Grudem, Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know (ed. Elliot Grudem; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 108.


\(^3\) Wayne A. Grudem, Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know (ed. Elliot Grudem; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 108.


II. When Christians Die:

a. What should a Christian do if they fear death?
   i. They should read and trust the Scriptures on God’s promises regarding death for the Believer: John 14:1-3; Phil. 1:21-23; 3:20-21; 2 Tim. 4:6-8; 1 Cor. 15:53-58; 2 Cor. 5:1-10; 1 Thess. 5:10; 1 Peter 1:3-5; Rev. 20:6; 21:4; Rom. 15:4; 8:28-30
   ii. If you fear death and find the words of Paul hard to believe, it may be helpful for you to confess that to the Lord. Ask him to increase your understanding of what happens when you die and to increase your faith in his goodness.7

b. What happens to a Christian’s body & soul when they die?
   i. When Christians die, their souls go immediately into God’s presence. Although their bodies remain in the ground, their souls go into the presence of their Creator. That is why Paul writes of being away from the body through death (2 Cor. 5:8) and departing in death to be with Christ (Phil. 1:23). Because the souls of Christians are eternally happy in the presence of God, there is no need to pray for them once they are dead. (This is an area where Roman Catholics hold a different view, since they believe that Christians who die go to purgatory and that our prayers can help them get out of purgatory sooner.)8

c. Even though we know our loved ones who are Believers go directly to heaven is still alright to mourn their loss?
   1. Although we know that the souls of believers are eternally happy in the presence of God, it is still right that we feel sorrow at the death of a Christian friend or relative. When the apostle Stephen was stoned, “devout men … made great lamentation over him” (Acts 8:2). Jesus himself wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus (John 11:35), both because of sorrow that his friend had died and because of sorrow for all who would experience the pain of death until his return. But the sorrow felt at the death of a Christian is not a hopeless sorrow since we know that a believer has gone to be with the Lord. Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, we do not “grieve as others do who have no hope.”9

III. When Non-Christians Die:

a. What happens to body and souls of non-Christians when they die?
   i. When people who have rejected the claims of Christ die, their souls go immediately to eternal punishment. But their bodies remain in the ground until Christ’s return, when they will join their souls for the final day of judgment (see Matt. 25:31–46; John 5:28–29; Acts 24:15; and Rev. 20:12).10

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8 Wayne A. Grudem, Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know (ed. Elliot Grudem;Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 110.
b. How should we respond to the death of someone we believe has rejected Christ?
   i. Scripture never encourages us to think that people will have a second chance to trust in Christ after death. In fact, the situation is quite the contrary as shown both in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (see Luke 16:24–26) and in general statements about death and judgment (see Heb. 9:27: “it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment”).

   ii. Therefore, the sorrow felt at the death of someone who we believe has rejected Christ is not a sorrow mingled with hope. When Paul thought about some fellow Jews who had rejected Christ he said, “I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart” (Rom. 9:2). However, we often do not have complete certainty that a friend or loved one has continued to reject Christ until the very end. The knowledge of impending death can bring about genuine heart searching and a person may come to genuine repentance and faith. In some cases, we simply do not know. Nevertheless, after a non-Christian has died, it would be wrong to give any indication to others that we think the person has gone to heaven since this would diminish the sense of urgency for those still alive to trust in Christ. When a non-Christian has died, it is often helpful to speak with genuine thankfulness about the good qualities that we noticed in the life of that person just as King David did when he learned that King Saul had died (2 Sam. 1:19–25).

IV. When Are Christians Raised from the Dead?
   a. When will Believers be raised from the dead?
      i. Again, if you are a believer in Jesus, when you die, your body will remain in the ground and your soul will go immediately into the presence of God. And so, until Christ returns, we wait for “the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved” (Rom. 8:23–24). That will be the day, Paul says, when we will be “glorified with” Christ (Rom. 8:17).

   b. What will happen on the day that Jesus returns for His church?
      i. For Christians who have died, the day when Christ returns will be the final step in the application of redemption. On that day their new, perfect bodies will be reunited with their souls. Christ was the first one raised with such a resurrection body, but Paul says that “at his coming” believers will also be raised in this way (1 Cor. 15:22–23). And for Christians who are still alive when Christ returns, their imperfect bodies will suddenly be changed into perfect ones. Paul says, “We shall not all sleep [that is, die], but we shall all be changed, 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” (1 Cor. 15:51–52). Therefore all believers in Jesus will receive renewed resurrection bodies just like their Savior received (1 Cor. 15:20, 23, 49; Phil. 3:21). This process is called “glorification” since our bodies receive a new heavenly kind of glory.

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These new bodies will be “imperishable” (1 Cor. 15:52), that is, they will not wear out, grow old, or ever be subject to sickness or disease. They will show no sign of aging but will instead be completely healthy and strong forever. The new bodies will be what God originally designed them to be: far more beautiful and attractive than anything we might imagine in this age. Those who are raised with Christ will forever live in bodies that have all the excellent qualities God created us to have. These bodies will forever be the living proof of the wisdom of God in creation—a creation he called “very good” (Gen. 1:31).

V. Questions for Review and Application:

a. Why do Christians die? How does that affect the way you think about your own death someday?

b. What happens to the bodies and what happens to the souls of Christians when they die? How does this make you feel? Why does it make you feel this way?

c. What will happen to the bodies of Christians when Jesus returns to earth? What specific aspects of our resurrection bodies are you especially hopeful about?

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