Chapter 41: Death and the Intermediate State

What is the purpose of death in the Christian life?
What happens to our bodies and souls when we die?

A) Why do Christians die?
   1) Death is not a punishment for Christians. All the penalty for our sins has been paid. (Rom. 8:1)
   2) Death is the final outcome of living in a fallen world. The last aspect of a fallen world to be removed will be death (1 Cor. 15:26, 54-55)
   3) God uses the experience of aging and death to complete our sanctification (Rom. 8:28, Heb. 2:10, Heb. 12:6, 10-11, Heb. 5:8, Rev. 2:10, Phil. 1:20).
   4) Our experience of death completes our union with Christ. (Rom. 8:17, 1 Peter 4:13, 1 Peter 2:21)
   5) Our obedience to God is more important than preserving our own lives. (Acts 20:24, Acts 21:13, 2 Cor. 11:23-27, 2 Tim. 4:6-7, Rev. 12:11)

B) How should we think of our own death and the death of others?
   1) Our own death: not with fear but with joy at the prospect of going to be with Christ. (2 Cor. 5:8, Phil. 1:22-23, Rev. 14:13; Heb. 2:15, Rom. 8:38-39)
   3) The death of unbelievers: but not mixed with the joy of assurance of salvation (Rom. 9:1-3, 2 Sam. 1:19-25).
      -- But we often do not have absolute certainty that a person has persisted in refusal to trust Christ all the way to the point of death. The knowledge of one’s impending death often will bring about genuine heart searching on the part of the dying person.
      -- Nevertheless, after a non-Christian has died, it would be wrong indicate to others that we think that person has gone to heaven. This would give misleading information and false assurance and diminish the urgency for those remaining to trust Christ.
      -- It is often helpful to recall the good qualities that you remember about the person’s life: 2 Sam 1:19-25

C) What happens when people die?
   1) The souls of believers go immediately into God’s presence. (2 Cor. 5:8, Phil. 1:23, Luke 23:43, Heb. 12:1, 22-24)
      i. The Bible does not teach the doctrine of Purgatory. In Roman Catholic teaching, Purgatory is the place where the souls of believers go to be further purified from sin until they are ready to be admitted into heaven. (supported from 2 Maccabees 12:42-45; also Matt. 12:32; 1 Cor. 3:15)
      ii. The Bible does not teach the doctrine of “soul sleep.” A metaphorical expression is used in these verses to teach that death is temporary. (Matt. 9:24, 24:52; John 11:11; Acts 7:60, 13:36; 1 Cor. 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thess. 4:13, 5:10).
      iv. Should we pray for the dead? No. To pray for the dead is simply to pray for something that God has told us has already been decided.
   i. Scripture never represents final judgment as depending on anything done after we die, but only on what has happened in this life (Matt. 25:31-46, Rom. 2:5-10).
   ii. Unbelievers await final judgment (Matt. 25: 31-46; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Rev. 20:12, 15)

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