

What Happens When I Die?

(2 Corinthians 5:1-10)

There's lots of interest about what happens when we die. Some people teach we just keep coming back until we get it right. This is called "reincarnation" and is the original lie of Satan, who said, "You will not surely die" (Gen. 3:4). However, we have only one life to live, and that is it. According to Hebrews 9:27, what happens when we die?

In this passage, Paul reveals three things that happen when I die. First ...

I will receive a new body (5:1-5).

Paul continues the contrast between things seen in the present, such as our problems, and wonderful things unseen in eternity (4:18). Therefore, he writes, *For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed (5:1a)*. Paul was a tentmaker by trade (Acts 18:3). So, he compares our human bodies to tents, which have always been a symbol of what is temporary or transitory.

When I was a boy scout we had these campouts. We would set up our tent knowing that in a week or so, we would take it down. When camping was over, the tent had served its purpose. So, we would take it down and go home to a much better place to live. That's what death is like for a Christian. We move out of our temporary bodies, which the Bible calls "tents."

After leaving our earthly tent, *we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (5:1b)*. *The building from God* refers to the resurrected, or glorified, bodies we will receive when Christ returns. What does Philippians 3:21a reveal will happen when Christ returns?

Because Paul's life was very difficult, he writes, *For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked (5:2-3)*. This clearly contradicts the idea that in heaven we will be spirits without bodies. Instead, we will each have our heavenly dwelling, or body.

Paul continues, *For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened - not that we would be unclothed* (5:4a). This means while we groan in our earthly bodies, we don't look forward to a time when we will be unclothed, or have no bodies. Jesus' own resurrected body proves this. When Jesus first appears to His disciples after His resurrection, He says, "*Peace be with you*" (Jn 20:19). Then, what does our Lord do (John 20:20b)?

As Paul continues, he writes that our spirits *will not be unclothed*, or naked, *but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life* (5:4b). This means we want to put on our new bodies so our *mortal*, or dying, bodies will be *swallowed up by life*. The phrase *swallowed up by life* refers to the complete redemption of our body. How is this described in 1 Corinthians 15:54?

Paul continues, *He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee* (5:5). The word translated *guarantee*, or "earnest," means "down payment" or "deposit."

The Holy Spirit may seem like a vague *guarantee* because we can't see or touch Him. However, we can see and experience what He produces in our lives-the character of Jesus Christ. This is called the "fruit of the Spirit," which is a word picture of Jesus (Gal. 5:22-23b). Through the process of sanctification, the Holy Spirit makes us more and more like Jesus.

In this life, the Holy Spirit supernaturally produces a Christ-like transformation in our lives (2 Cor. 3:18). This is our *guarantee* He will transform us completely in the future by giving us glorified bodies. I am sure He who began a good work in me will bring it to completion when my Lord returns (Philip. 1:6).

When I die, **I will receive a new body** and ...

I will be with the Lord (5:6-8).

Understanding this truth, Paul writes, *So we are always of good courage*, or "are always confident," and *know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord* (5:6). While in our present bodies, we can talk to God through prayer, we can study His written Word, and we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. However, we still long for a more intimate relationship with Him. How does Psalm 42:1 express this fact?

Next, Paul *writes for we walk by faith, not by sight (5:7)*. *Faith* is how we have fellowship with the *unseen* God in this life. *Faith* is living in light of the ultimate *unseen* realities, rather than those visible in the present. Paul repeats verse six in verse eight.

This passage raises questions about what is called the "intermediate state" between death and the resurrection of the body. These verses make it clear there is a conscious, personal existence for a believer immediately after death. We will have our *heavenly dwelling (5:2)*, or body. However, our new bodies will not be complete until the resurrection. When we die, we will neither sleep nor be in some kind of limbo until the resurrection. To clear up the confusion, what does Paul write in Philippians 1:23b?

To suggest any other explanation would be pure conjecture. The Bible gives no other details about the "intermediate state" because that is all we need to know.

When I die, **I will receive a new body, will be with the Lord**, and ..

I will be judged (5:9-10).

Knowing I will be with Jesus when I die should motivate me to live for Him, regardless of how much tribulation I must endure in this life. Therefore, whether I am at home or away, I must make it my aim to please Him (5:9). What other motivation for pleasing Him is found in 5:10a?

Our salvation is by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9), but we all will still be judged by Christ. Jesus said, "*The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son*" (Jn 5:22; See also Acts 10:42; Rom. 2:16; 2 Tim. 4:1).

Appearing before *the judgment seat of Christ* is not to determine our eternal destiny. That is decided in this life by what we do with Christ accept Him or reject Him. The word translated *judgment seat* (BEMA, bay'-ma) means "a raised place." It denotes a raised platform reached by steps. In Greek culture, it referred to the elevated platform where athletes receive their crowns or wreaths-much like how modern athletes receive their medals at the Olympic games.

The purpose of *the judgment seat* is so that *each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil (5:10b)*. Only believers appear at *the judgment seat of Christ* to receive their crowns or eternal reward.

All unbelievers will appear at the "Great White Throne Judgment" described in Revelation 20:11-15. At this judgment, the degree of eternal punishment for each unrepentant person will be determined. Jesus has stern words for the unrepentant cities of Chorazin (ko-ray-zin '), Tyre, Sidon, Capernaum, and Bethsaida in Matthew 11:21-23. Then, what declaration does He make about all of these cities (Matthew 11:24)?

With that statement, Jesus makes it clear there will be degrees of punishment in hell. He also reveals the most severely punished will be those who know about Him and yet reject Him. That's why the cowardly and faithless head the list of horrible sinners who are cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 21:8).

However, believers will appear at *the judgment seat of Christ*. Some will receive no reward but still be saved, because salvation is the result of God's grace, not our works. What does 1 Corinthians 3:15 reveal about the judgment seat of Christ?

For some Christians, getting into heaven will be like waking up in the middle of the night to find their homes engulfed in flames. They must flee and watch everything they worked for all their lives being destroyed by fire, but their lives are spared.

When I die, **I will receive a new body, will be with the Lord, and will be judged.** Are you ready to die? If not, you can get ready right now (see page 4 of this study).