

## Introduction

What is death? The Bible talks about spiritual death (being dead in our sins, not alive toward spiritual things), physical death (separation of the body and the soul), and eternal death (punishment of body and soul in hell). Our focus today is on our physical death.

Physical death is the destruction of the body and the separation of soul and body. James uses physical death as a picture of dead faith when he says, “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead” (James 2:26). Solomon speaks of death in this way: “the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (Ecc. 12:7).

Scripture calls death “the king of terrors” (Job 18:14). It’s a terrible consequence of sin. It is not natural. Death breaks our dreams and ambitions. It’s always there, as a possibility, and time marches us closer and closer to it. Ten out of ten people alive today will die, unless Jesus returns first. What happens to our soul when we die? What happens to our body when we die?

**TBC Q. 40 - What benefits do believers receive from Christ at their death?**

*A. 40 - The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.*

## 1. The Souls of Believers at Death

Scripture provides us with progressive revelation of the rest and bliss that believers have in God’s presence when they die. What God reveals to us in Scripture is sufficient for our needs in this life, but does not tell us everything we would like to know. For that, we will have to wait and see when that glorious day comes.

### **A. Made perfect in holiness**

*A. 40 - The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness...*

- **The soul continues after death.** Discuss how these verses demonstrate this: Matt. 10:28; Ex. 3:6; cf. Mt. 22:32.
- **What is the condition of the soul upon death?** Consider also Rev. 6:9-11. What does it say about the condition of our spirits? What is “already” and what is “not yet”? Is sin in our soul entirely removed at death? What can we learn from Heb. 12:23?

### **B. Immediately pass into glory**

*A. 40 - The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory...*

- We should understand “glory” here to refer to the presence of God. See Psalm 73:23-26.
- Other passages speak of death bringing us into God’s presence. Consider 2 Corinthians 5:6-8, Philipians 1:23, and Luke 23:43.
- These passages focus on our intermediate state, between death and resurrection. What comfort can these verses give to us who lose Christian loved ones? What comfort can be they provide for us in our dying days and hours?

## 2. The ***Bodies*** of Believers at Death

### A. ***Still United to Christ***

A. 40 - ...*their bodies being still united to Christ...*

- **Our bodies are still “us” at death.** Some have said, “this is not him, he’s gone.” While it is appropriate to say he is gone, since that conscious part of him is with the Lord, it is not entirely correct to say that the body is not the person. While our bodies at death are dead and beginning to decompose, Scripture’s language still affirms that that is part of us. Observe the burial of Abraham in Gen. 25:7-11, Rebekah’s nurse in Gen. 35:8, and Jesus in John 19:42.<sup>1</sup>
- **Our bodies are still united to Christ at death.** It is not merely our souls that are united with Jesus, but our bodies as well, “Do you no know that your *bodies* are members of Christ?” (1 Cor. 6:15). 1 Thes. 4:14-16 speaks of the dead in Christ falling asleep. The souls cannot be said to sleep, but the body can be said to sleep. Both are united to Christ in death. “When the soul goes one way, and the body another, Christ still abides firmly knit to them both. For this reason dying believers are said to sleep in Jesus (1 Thess. 4:14). And it is the body that only can properly be said to sleep.”<sup>2</sup>
- **If our bodies are still us, and are still united to Christ, how should we treat our bodies?** “Therefore, the death and decay of the body does not mean that it is now mere rubbish to be discarded, but it remains part of the believer. We should treat the bodies of the deceased wit honor and respect, and see to their proper burial.”<sup>3</sup> What about the times we are not able to bury? There is no reason for alarm, what is sown is perishable, what is raised is perishable. We do our best to honor the deceased body, and don’t put our trust in our ability to preserve the perishable kernel, but in God’s power to raise the kernel imperishable (1 Cor. 15:35-44).

### B. ***Rest in graves till resurrection***

A. 40 - ...*their bodies being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.*

- Isaiah 57:2 he enters into peace; they rest in their beds who walk in their uprightness.

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<sup>1</sup> See also Gen. 15:15; 35:19; 35:29; 49:31; Ruth 1:17; Acts 2:29; 5:6, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Beeke and Smalley, Reformed Systematic Theology, 779, citing puritan Samuel Willard.

<sup>3</sup> Beeke and Smalley, *RST*, 780.