

Christian Doctrine

#1 - It's a picture which we've either considered or perhaps heard in a joke – St. Peter, standing at the pearly gates, making the determination of who will inhabit heaven. In one way or another, people do wonder about “making it into heaven?” And if they have to wonder about making it into heaven, all of a sudden death is not at all a welcome prospect.

A strong fear of death usually comes from the thinking that your fate will be decided after you die, because, after all, no one can really know what comes after death unless he has experienced it, right? Such thinking can easily influence people to say things like, “I hope (or “I’m fairly confident”) I’ll go to heaven when I die.” But such an approach really looks at heaven as being a reward for living a good life. If that’s how it works, then we can’t know what the real outcome of our death will be, because while we’re on earth we’ll never know if we’ve been good enough. Realizing that God doesn’t grade on a curve, it’s no wonder that this approach to death or Judgment Day leaves people feeling uncomfortable.

#2 - A person’s fate is not arbitrarily decided once he appears before God, as if once you die God looks up your name, pulls your file and says, “Let’s see here.” Right here and now a Christian can know with certainty where he will be in the hereafter.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son (John 3:17-18).

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him (John 3:36).

Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent (John 17:3).

I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life (John 5:24).

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:11-13).

#3 - Death: The Time for Private Judgment

People have come up with all kinds of ideas about what happens after your heart stops beating and doctors have determined that your brain has ceased functioning. Almost jokingly, UAW workers might refer to the hereafter as that big assembly line in the sky. At one time, native Americans looked forward to being in the happy hunting grounds. Eastern religions have for a long time taught reincarnation, coming back as something better or worse based on how much good or bad karma you have. And others have thought or believed or hoped that once you die, that’s it – you simply cease to exist. All these are really blatant departures from what the Bible says happens after death.

#4 - Death involves separation. The Bible speaks about three kinds of death:

Physical death

Physical separation from physical blessings (breathing, heartbeat)

Spiritual death

Spiritual separation from spiritual blessings (forgiveness, peace with God)

A person can be physically alive but spiritually dead (unbelief).

Eternal death

Eternal separation from eternal blessings (God’s presence, sinless bliss)

The reason for physical death is quite simple.

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned – (Romans 5:12).

What happens when a person dies is quite clear.

...and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

Upon the occurrence of physical death, a person's soul goes immediately to one of two places – heaven or hell. The sole basis for this judgment of God is the presence of faith in Christ (heaven) or the absence of faith in Christ (hell).

Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment (Hebrews 9:27).

For the believer, death means instant entrance into heaven.

Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8).

I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far (Philippians 1:23).

Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on" (Revelation 14:13a).

#5 - For the unbeliever, death means instant entrance into hell.

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire." But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us." He answered, "Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment." Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them." "No, father Abraham," he said, "but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent." He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:19-31).

From this account we learn the following:

- 1) There is no soul sleep or "limbo" after death.
- 2) There is no "transmigration of souls" in eternity.
- 3) After death, it's too late to hear the Word and trust the Lord.

The Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory dates as far back as 400 B.C. The Greek philosopher Plato espoused the teaching that after death, many people go to a place of purging, a place where they can pay off whatever sins they didn't pay off while on earth. Pope Gregory the Great made purgatory an official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church in 593 A.D. The doctrine of purgatory makes a mockery of the doctrine of the cross, which says that Christ paid for all sins by his one sacrifice.

#6 - For the believer in Jesus, death means instant entrance into heaven. For the unbeliever, death means instant entrance into hell.

#7 - Judgment Day: A Time for Public Judgment

If a person dies and is immediately judged, a Judgment Day at the end of world history could seem like a second judgment. Those who die before the last day go immediately to either heaven or hell, based solely on the presence or absence of faith in Christ. On the last day, all people who ever lived will appear before Christ. For those who had already died, especially for those who were sent to hell, Judgment Day holds out no second chance. On Judgment Day, the billions of souls who at their time of death were judged privately will be judged publicly. In this way, all people will know that Jesus is who he said he was. In this way, all people will realize that things are how Jesus said they were.

#8 - Jesus spoke of signs of the last day, sure indications that his return is imminent.

Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains. You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. ...those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now – and never to be equaled again. If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them. At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect – if that were possible. So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time. But in those days, following that distress, 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken'" (Mark 13:5-13; 19-25).

Some signs will be seen in...

- nature (earthquakes, famines, floods, hurricanes)
- the lives of men and nations (wars, internal family strife)
- the religious world (false Christs, false teachers, persecution)

Judging from the fact that all these signs have taken place, Judgment Day is imminent.

#9 - The basis for Christ's judgment

There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day (John 12:48).

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16).

#10 - Manifestation

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God (1 Thessalonians 4:16a).

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief (2 Peter 3:10a).

#11 - Manifestation

Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him (Revelation 1:7).

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory (Matthew 25:31).

#12 - Resurrection

Christ will raise the dead bodies of all people, believers and unbelievers.

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

#13 - Resurrection

However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked (Acts 24:14-15).

#14 - Glorification

Dead believers will have their bodies raised in a glorified state. Believers still living on earth at Christ's return will have their bodies changed into a glorified state. The latter group will then join the former group in the air to meet the Lord. This will happen very quickly. (Both resurrected unbelievers and living unbelievers will also appear before Christ, but their bodies will not be glorified.)

...who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:21).

#15 - Glorification

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

#16 - Reunion

According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

#17 - Separation

The judgment will take place, with Christ separating believers from unbelievers.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left (Matthew 25:31-33).

#18 - At the end of a day, a Palestinian shepherd would lead a flock of sheep and goats into their respective folds for the evening. One of the shepherds standing near a double gate would steer the sheep to one side into their fold, and the goats to the other side into their fold. On Judgment Day, Jesus, since he is the Son of God, will divide believers from unbelievers as easily as a Palestinian shepherd divided sheep from goats. Jesus can see faith in himself or the absence of such faith as easily as a shepherd can tell the difference between a sheep and a goat.

#19 - Destruction

This universe, as we know it, will pass away.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness (2 Peter 3:10-13).

#20 - Hell

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16).

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire" (Luke 16:23-24).

Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Then they will go away to eternal punishment (Matthew 25:41,46a).

Then the king told the attendants, "Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 22:13).

And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind (Isaiah 66:24).

Hell is complete, unending, internal and external torment. The greatest torment of hell is that it is complete separation from God. This is what Jesus was suffering while he hung on the cross. It is what unbelievers will suffer forever.

And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" – which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Mark 15:34)?

He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed (2 Thessalonians 1:8-10a).

Occupants of hell have raging consciences which will never be quieted. Occupants of hell have to eternally grapple with the fact that their sins were truly forgiven but they stubbornly refused to believe it. It has been said that one of the worst things God can do is to let people have what they want. That is very true of hell. To those who want nothing to do with God, God is very accommodating. "You wanted to be without me during all your days on earth. You wanted me to stop bothering you and you demanded that I leave you alone for you wished to do as you please. Fine. Have it your way. Be without me forever."

A believer in Christ is not in danger of going to hell, nor does God want the believer to live in constant fear of hell. For the believer, hell is a warning directed against the desires of the sinful nature, a threat against disinterest and unbelief in the gospel.

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28).

#21 - Heaven

While on earth, Christians believe that God has declared them to be holy for Christ's sake. They still have a sinful nature which causes them much grief, but their sinful condition is covered over by the righteousness of Christ. In heaven, believers are not declared holy – they are made holy. Their sinful nature is forever removed. They are essentially holy, not equal to God, but once again like him in holiness.

Heaven is a place of joy where the believer continuously delights in serving and worshiping God. In heaven, the believer shares in Christ's glory and reigns with him.

You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand (Psalm 16:11).

Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them" (Revelation 7:15).

Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Revelation 7:16-17).

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21:3-4).

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 21:22-27).

As the worst part of hell is being forever separate from God, the best part of heaven is that we will see the Lord and be in his presence forever.

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known (1 Corinthians 13:12).

I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far (Philippians 1:23).

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

The prospect of Judgment Day fills the Christian with joy. It is the consummation of all the promises which Christ has given us. The thought of it lightens the load we bear. We long for that day to come.

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us (Romans 8:18).

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20).

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes – I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me (Job 19:25-27)!

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

And so, hearing Jesus' testimony...

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

...we respond:

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus (Revelation 22:20).