

TO DIE IS GAIN – PART TWO

The Book of Philippians #6

We are in the book of Philippians, the first chapter, and we are looking at the statement which Paul made in verse 21.

“To live is Christ and to die is gain.”

Paul has no fear of death. In death he loses nothing but gains everything. Whether he dies by the hand of Rome or goes to meet Christ in the air, death is no tragedy to him. To him it is “gain”. Paul is expecting something more after death than he has been experiencing while on earth.

But is there an immediate “gain” or a delayed “gain”? Do we die and go into oblivion for a period of time before “waking up” in heaven or hell? Or do we go to some sort of “in-between” place where we must do something before we gain entrance into heaven?

We mentioned last week that the Bible tells us that Jesus has left this world and is preparing a place for us in His Father’s house. He speaks of His wedding with His bride, the church, and that there will be a feast to celebrate this wedding. All of these things we can look forward to because they are the promises of God. But some have stated there is an “in-between” place where believers go before arriving at their final destination of heaven.

So in last week’s sermon we looked at two church doctrines that seek to reveal what happens to us after death. We looked at the concept Purgatory, an ‘in-between’ place historically upheld by the Catholic. What this doctrine basically says is this: Grace will guarantee you entrance, but the punishment for sin must still be fully paid by the one committing the sin. And this payment depends on the number and type of sin which you committed. If your life runs out before your payment is completed on earth then you must make up the difference in Purgatory.

This idea of having to pay for your sins even after you have been forgiven was found in Mathew 18:23-25. But this passage did not speak of any repayment plan occurring in a place called Purgatory to which unforgiving people go after death. And though the doctrine of Purgatory is taken from other sources as well, I find none of these Scriptures support this theory. Something has to be implied that is not specifically stated. This is using human conjecture rather than the Spirit inspired tools of Biblical interpretation, and ignores a multitude of Scriptures that contradict this view.

Since we talked last week I have had a few of you former Catholics tell me that you do not believe the Catholic church still holds to this doctrine today. That it was put aside years ago. So I looked it up on the web and you may indeed be true. But I found explanations of the doctrine of purgatory by Catholic priests all the way ‘till today. So perhaps some have forsaken this doctrine. But it seems some leaders in the church have not.

After Purgatory we looked at the concept of “soul sleep”. This concept comes from groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-Day Adventists who claim that we are no longer conscious beings at the time of our death but that our soul either ceases to exist or is asleep until the Second Coming of Christ which brings about their resurrection from the dead.

We looked 1 Thessalonians where this concept could possibly have arisen. It is here that Paul speaks of believers who have “fallen asleep”, meaning they have died, and gives instructions as to what will happen with them. But Paul mentioned nothing about being in a state with no consciousness until the Resurrection. Once again something has to be implied that is not implicitly stated using human

conjecture rather than the Spirit inspired tools of Biblical interpretation. Like the doctrine of Purgatory, the concept of “soul sleep” ignores a multitude of Scriptures that contradict this view.

So today we are going to further reveal the truth concerning “soul sleep” and Purgatory by looking beyond the false teachings of others and onto what the Bible actually says - not from its silence, but from its inspired words. After all only God Himself knows what happens after death. And happily He has recorded some answers for us in His word.

So let’s continue our journey by first addressing the concept of “soul sleep”- a state of unconscious after death continuing until the resurrection. Does the Bible say that the dead are awake or asleep? Are they aware of their surroundings or are they oblivious to it? Let’s look at a few passages from Luke and Revelation.

LUKE 16:22-26.

“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.'”

REVELATION 6:9-11

“When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.”

From these scriptures we can see that the dead are conscious and aware of what is happening around them. They are not in an unconscious state. But could they be awake and aware but still be atoning for their sins? Let’s see what Revelation has to say about that.

REVELATION 14:13

“And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, ‘Write, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!”’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.’”

We see from this passage that the dead rest from their labors. They are not perfecting themselves in some intermediate state before they gain entrance into heaven. But is there still some interim period before we enter heaven? Let’s look at Luke and 2 Corinthians for the answer.

LUKE 23:43

“And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-9

“For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that

what is mortal will be swallowed up by life.

*Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that **while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord** - for we walk by faith, not by sight - we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather **to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord**. Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him."*

These two passages show us that there is no intermediate state. When we leave our bodies behind in death we are immediately with the Lord. There is no "waiting" or intermediate period of time.

Another thing we need to address is the concept of having to atone for our sins. That yes, grace is a sufficient ticket for entry but must we pay the full penalty for our sins before we can gain entrance into heaven after death? Must we atone for our sins as a punishment for committing them? Scripture says no.

ISAIAH 53:3-6

*"He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but **the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him**."*

ROMANS 3:21-26

*"But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This **righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe**. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood--to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus."*

HEBREWS 2:17

"(Jesus) had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people."

So we see from these Scriptures that payment and punishment for sin is required. God is a holy God and He punishes any and all sin and requires restitution to be made for it; But notice who God accepts as atonement for our sins. It is not us. It is Christ. The Lord caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. He was the perfect and only acceptable sacrifice for sin. So yes, atonement for sin is required but not from us. We could never atone for even one sin. Not in this life nor in the next. Only Jesus could pay it all. And He has already done so once for all. There is no need for any future atonement for sin. Jesus paid it all at Calvary.

So we have one more issue to address, the issue of "perfection". When will we receive this "perfection" and does this "perfection" depend on us? Does this only come after we have paid the full price for our sins? Or is this too dependent on the work of Christ?

1 CORINTHIANS 15:51-57

“Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will 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 will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

There is no “purification” period for the dead or the living. The perfection for those living on earth occurs when their bodies are transformed in the rapture / resurrection. We will all be transformed in the twinkling of an eye. And it will have nothing to do with any work that we do between our death and our being with Christ. It all has to do, from start to finish, with the work that Christ did for us on the cross.

And this is the heart of the matter of Purgatory. Who is responsible for making atonement for sin? Whose penance will God accept, ours or Christ’s? If our penance was sufficient then there would have been no need for the Law to be overridden by the death of Christ. There has always been only one acceptable sacrifice for sin and it has never been the one that humans provide.

And who is responsible for “perfection”? Christ may have paid the entrance price but do we need to complete the payment for our sins even after we have received grace in order to become perfect? For no imperfect thing can enter heaven.

There has never been any good work that could satisfy any penalty that God required for sin except the good work of Christ on the cross. So to even entertain the idea of perfecting ourselves by paying for our own sins, whether in this life or the next, is to introduce heresy into the church. And to say that we have been saved by grace but that we cannot inherit its promise of eternal life until we pay the penalty for our sin is to say that the penalty that Christ paid is incomplete and needed the added work of penance in the afterlife in order for it to be effective. Once again, this is inconsistent with Scripture and contradictory to it.

Why did I spend so much time on this issue? Because I want you to be able to know what you believe and why what others teach is not scripturally sound. I don’t want you to be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine that you hear. I want you to know the truth and to walk in it.

It is in Christ alone that that our hope is found. He conquered both death and sin. And as He stands in this victory so do we. We have been bought with the precious blood of Christ. Because of Him sin’s curse and lost its grip on us. No power of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck us from His hand. And no doctrine can tell us otherwise. It is in the power of Christ that we stand. And it is by faith in His atoning blood that we will enter heaven the moment after He calls us home.

When Christ said, *“It is finished”* that is exactly what it was – finished. Everything that needed to be done to redeem sinful man had been done. Nothing was incomplete. As the old hymn says, *“Jesus paid it all. All to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain. He washed it white as snow.”*

And that hope is found not in penance in the afterlife, but in Christ alone. He is the One in whom we put our trust. He is our cornerstone, our solid ground upon which we can rest, secure in the knowledge that when we die we who believe will go directly into the presence of Christ. In His love, in His death, through the precious blood and in the power of Christ we stand. All other ground is sinking sand.

IN CHRIST ALONE

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid Ground
Firm to the fiercest drought and storm

*What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when striving cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand*

In Christ alone who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
The gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save

*Till on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live*

There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again

*And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ*

No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny

*No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand
Here in the power of Christ alone*

Words by Stuart Townend, Music by Keith Getty, © 2001 Kingsway's Thankyou Music,
Administered by EMI Christian Music Publishing, Used by permission CCLI #829565

Unless otherwise noted all scriptures have been taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.