

A Christian View of Life and Death

Compiled by Dr. Marcus J. Serven

“So teach us to number our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom.” Psalm 90:12

Introduction:

— Professor D. W. Vere, MD “The Christian view of death and dying is so at variance with a secular view, and indeed that of most other faiths, that conflicts often arise about this within individuals and families, and both within and between societies. To the secular mind, death is an ultimate disaster, to be averted or postponed as far as possible. The Christian view is that death happens to all (Rom. 5:12), and is to be accepted where the dying process makes it inevitable (2 Pet. 1:13-14), but averted where this is not the case (Luke 10:30-37). For the Christian, death is not the ultimate disintegration, though it is in a sense a ‘sacrament’ or outward sign of universal sinfulness (Rom. 5:12b). The endowment of a new body of a kind foreign to this present age (1 Cor. 15:35-54) renders death an essential preparation for resurrection in Christ (1 Cor. 15:49). So what matters most is not death, but a person’s union with Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Further, secular views are strangely contradictory. On the one hand, death is seen as the ultimate terror to be avoided or postponed, even by exaggerated medical means which are doomed to fail... On the other hand, life can be regarded as so broken, disabled or fading as to be not worthwhile, or of no social value, and hence it may be neglected or even extinguished by voluntary or involuntary euthanasia.” (“Death and Dying” in *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, IVP, 284-285)

Creation:

— Genesis 1:26-28 “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

— Genesis 2:15-17 “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it... You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

— Genesis 2:18, 24-25 “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper fit for him... Therefore a man shall love his father and his mother and hold fast to this wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.’”

The Fall:

— Genesis 3:6-7 “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. The eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.”

— Genesis 3:15 “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

— Romans 5:12 “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”

Redemption:

— Matthew 1:21 “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

— John 10:10-11 “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

— Romans 5:18-19 “Therefore, as one trespass led condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”

— 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 “For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”

— 1 Peter 2:24-25 “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you are healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

The Consummation:

— Matthew 25:44-46 “Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, by the righteous into eternal life.”

— Mark 9:43-49 “...to hell, to the unquenchable fire...thrown into hell, where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. For all will be salted with fire.”

— 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 “We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord...and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”

— 2 Corinthians 5:10 “For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”

— Hebrews 9:27-28 “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgement, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”

— Revelation 7:17 “For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

— Revelation 14:13 “And I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Blessed indeed,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!’”

Confessional Reconnaissance:

— Apostles’ Creed “I believe in...the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.”

— Heidelberg Catechism (1563)

Q. 1. What is thy only comfort in life and in death?

A. That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with His precious blood has fully satisfied my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me, that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must work together for my salvation. Wherefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready henceforth to live unto Him.

— Westminster Confession of Faith, *Larger Catechism* (1647)

Q. 86. What is the communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death?

A. The communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death, is, in that their souls are then made perfect in holiness, and received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies, which even in death continue united to Christ, and rest in their graves as in their beds, till at the last day they be again united to their souls. Whereas the souls of the wicked are at their death cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, and their bodies kept in their graves, as in their prisons, till the resurrection and judgment of the great day.

Wise Advice and Counsel:

— Professor D. W. Vere, MD “The discussion of spiritual topics with the dying is a vital pastoral concern; many dying people are too confused or toxic to grasp abstract or new ideas, though lucid intervals often occur. It is best to approach such topics through the sufferers’ own immediate concerns, through what is at the top of their agenda...encourage prayer...Many dying people need to be reminded of trust which they have ceased to exercise, or of which they have never seen their need to use before.” (“Death and Dying” in *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, IVP, 284-285)