

Rooted—A Journey Through the Westminster Confession of Faith

Session 52: Chapter 32~Of the State of Men After Death, and of the Resurrection of the Dead

Introduction—The final two chapters of the Confession take up matters of eschatology or final things. In this session we will consider the question of what happens to us after we die.¹

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*32.1 After death, the bodies of men decay and return to dust, but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal existence, return immediately to God, who gave them. The souls of the righteous are then made perfect in holiness and received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory as they wait for the full redemption of their bodies. The souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness as they are kept for the judgment of the great day. Scripture recognizes no other place except these two for the souls which have been separated from their bodies.*

#### I. Death And Its Aftermath

##### A. What happens to the body?

1. Because of man's fall, the body decays after death.
  - "... till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust and to dust you shall return." Genesis 3.19b
2. This is true for all except Jesus.
  - "For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption." (Psalm 16.10; Acts 2.27; 13.35-37)

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<sup>1</sup> So many questions come to mind when we open up this discussion. There are two books that I have found helpful and can recommend. *The Bible on the Life Hereafter*, by William Hendricksen, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1959; *Immortality*, by Loraine Boettner, Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, Phillipsburg.

## B. What happens to the soul?

1. The soul will not die, nor will it sleep. Its existence is immortal.
  - “We must be careful with the word *immortal*, however, because of the baggage it carries from ancient Greek philosophy, in which the soul was seen as eternal. As Christians, we believe that human souls are created, not eternal.... The Greek notion of the immortality of the soul is that the human soul is inherently and intrinsically immortal. We do not believe that. A human soul cannot survive for five seconds without the sustaining power of God. God will preserve our souls and even the souls of the damned forever, but they are not inherently indestructible. They would perish if God withdrew His providential support from them.”<sup>2</sup>
2. The souls of the righteous return to God who gave them. (Ecclesiastes 12.7; Luke 23.43)
  - “My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.” Philippians 1.23
3. The souls of the righteous are made perfect in holiness. Their sanctification is complete. (Hebrews 12.23)
4. The souls of the righteous are temporarily and unnaturally separated from their bodies awaiting their adoption as sons, the full redemption of their bodies. (Romans 8.15, 23) This is often referred to as the *intermediate state* because it is not the final state of glory.
5. The souls of the wicked are cast into hell to await the judgment of the last day. (Luke 16.23-24; Jude 6-7)

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<sup>2</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Truths We Confess*, Reformation Trust, Sanford, 2019, p. 643.  
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6. Scripture recognizes only two destinations: Heaven or hell. There is no third destination, such as purgatory.<sup>3</sup>

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32.2 At the last day those who are alive shall not die but shall be changed. All the dead shall be raised up with their selfsame bodies, and no other (although with different qualities), which shall be united again with their souls forever.

II. The Day of the Lord's Return

"Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall 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 shall be changed." I Corinthians 15.51-52

"For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so will we always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words."

I Thessalonians 4.16-18

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*32.3 By the power of Christ the bodies of the unjust shall be raised to dishonor. The bodies of the just shall be raised to honor by his Spirit and brought into conformity with Christ's own glorious body.*

## III. A Resurrection of the Just and the Unjust

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<sup>3</sup> For a brief discussion of purgatory, see Q&A: Is Purgatory Biblical? - Third Millennium Ministries, Joseph R. Nally, Jr.

“... having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.” Acts 24.15

“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” Daniel 12.2

“Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” John 5.28-29

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***Next Assignment: WCF 33.1-3
Confessing the Faith: pages 435-444***

And Can It Be?

And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain? For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou, my God shouldst die for me?

Chorus

Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

He left His Father's throne above, so free, so infinite His grace!
Emptied Himself of all but love, and bled for Adam's helpless race!
'Tis mercy all, immense and free for, O my God, it found out me.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay fast bound in sin and nature's night.
Thine eye diffused a quick-'ning ray: I woke—the dungeon flamed with light!
My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread: Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head, and clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th' eternal throne, and claim the crown, thru Christ my own.