

# Departing and Being with Christ.

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“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor; yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better; nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.” Phil. 1: 21-24.

WHAT did Paul mean by departing?

It is fair to answer this by his words to Timothy: “The time of my departure is at hand.” 2 Tim. 4: 6. It was his death.

Could he be with Christ by dying?

That depends upon the place to which the dead go.

Where do the dead go?

To sheol or hades, the one of these names being the Hebrew, and the other the Greek, term to designate the place of the dead.

How do you know that the dead go to sheol or hades? The psalmist asks what man there is that can deliver his soul from death and sheol. Ps. 89: 48. Jacob, at death, entered sheol. Gen. 38: 35; 43: 38; 44: 29, 31. Korah and his company went down into sheol. Num. 16: 30, 33. Job was to be hid in sheol, and wait there till the resurrection. Job 14: 13; 17: 13. All the wicked go into sheol. Ps. 9: 17; 31: 17; 49: 14. All mankind go there. Ps. 89: 48; Eccl. 9: 10. (N. B. These words in our English version are sometimes translated grave, and sometimes hell.)

Have you any other proof that the dead are in hades? Yes. When the resurrection occurs, all

the righteous being rescued from death and the place of the dead, triumph over both in most exultant language. 1 Cor. 15 : 51-55. And at the second resurrection, both death and hades give up the wicked dead. Rev. 20 : 11-15. Paul did, therefore, enter hades by departing this life.

Did Paul find Christ in hades ?

No, indeed. Christ had been there before Paul, but was not there when Paul entered the silent abode of the dead. We have express statements on this point. Peter says that David spoke of Christ's resurrection when he said, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell." (Greek, hades.) And he informs us that at the resurrection of Christ, "his soul was not left in hell," or hades. Observe, this is not spoken of his death that his soul was not left in hades; for then it might be evaded as meaning that his soul should not be suffered to enter hades at all. But it is spoken of his resurrection that his soul was not left there. And this proves, beyond dispute, that his soul did enter this abode of the dead, but remained there only till the morning of the third day. Compare Acts 2 : 25-31 ; Ps. 16 : 8-11.

But was not Paul grievously disappointed, on entering the place of the dead, not to meet Jesus there ?

There is no reason to believe that he expected to meet him in hades. In fact, there is excellent testimony to show that he looked to a very different occasion for the meeting with Christ. But there was no sadness, gloom, nor disappointment, to Paul in hades. It is a place where there is no knowledge. Eccl. 9 : 10. Those who enter there have no thoughts. Ps. 146 : 4.

All is silence, darkness, sleep, rest. The

wicked therein are silent in death. Ps. 31 : 17. The righteous in sheol do not praise God, and do not even remember him to whom they have given their lives to honor. Ps. 6 : 5 ; Isa. 37 : 10-19 ; Ps. 115 : 17.

But how sad and gloomy such a prison-house to Paul, and how long and dreary his confinement therein ?

To the living the grave may be dark and cold, and the period of waiting may seem long and tedious. But not so to the silent sleeper in his quiet rest. There is no lapse of time to those whose thoughts have perished. There is no gloom to those who "know not anything." Eccl. 9 : 5. There can be nothing tedious, nor distressing, nor unpleasant, to those in hades. In fact, there can be no time to them at all. It is an atom of time, as the twinkling of an eye. Rather, it is simply a blank. This is proved by facts of frequent occurrence. Men receive blows upon the brain which destroy the power of thought. They remain in this condition sometimes for months. When consciousness is restored, thought begins at the very point where it was suspended.

An officer wounded in battle, and remaining months without a thought, when relieved by surgical operation has arisen in bed and finished the order he was giving when struck down. This shows that to those who have no power of thought time is annihilated. To Stephen, who fell asleep while gazing upon the glory of Heaven, it will ever be the same as though, without one moment's delay, he had entered it. Acts 7 : 55-60. And so of many Christians who have had rapturous views of Heaven in the hour of their death. It will never seem to them as though Heaven had

even disappeared from their view. In winking, we cease to gaze upon that which is before us. It disappears from our view, yet we do not even notice the disappearance of the object. Such is the sleep of death. To the sleeper, it is an imperceptible atom of time, of which he can take no account.

Have you any evidence that Paul did not expect to be with Christ till the resurrection?

Judge for yourself in the light of such words as the following: "If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage it me IF THE DEAD RISE NOT? let us eat and drink, for TO-MORROW WE DIE." 1 Cor. 15: 32. If Paul entered Heaven by dying, and by that event was taken to be with Christ, where there is fullness of joy, was not this of some advantage to him? Suppose there never should be a resurrection, would not Paul's immortal soul—if he had one—in the felicity of Heaven find something to compensate his cross-bearing life? Indeed, he would, were he to enter Christ's presence at death, even though there were no resurrection. But he plainly indicates that if there was to be no resurrection, there would be no reward; a decisive proof that he knew nothing of the entrance into the heavenly city by the gate of death. In fact, had he entertained such an idea, instead of speaking of immediate death as a sad thing if there were no resurrection beyond it, he would have said, "Courage, brethren, to-morrow we die, and that will usher us into our Lord's presence." His words convey, in every respect, the opposite idea.

Was there not some point of time to which Paul looked for deliverance and reward? Was this the day of death, or of the coming of Jesus?

There is a certain day which he has emphasized very remarkably. It bears the designation in his epistles of "THAT DAY." It is thus presented:

1 Thess. 5:2, 4: "For yourselves know perfectly that THE DAY OF THE LORD so cometh as a thief in the night. . . . But ye, brethren, are not in darkness that THAT DAY should overtake you as a thief."

2 Thess. 1:10: "*When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in THAT DAY.*"

2 Thess. 2:1-3: "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the *coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter, as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.*"

2 Tim. 1:12: "For the which cause I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against THAT DAY."

2 Tim. 1:18: "The Lord grant unto him [Onesiphorus] that he may find mercy of the Lord in THAT DAY; and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well."

2 Tim. 4:6-8: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; *henceforth* there is laid up for me a *crown of righteousness*, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, *shall give me at*

THAT DAY; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love *his appearing*."

These scriptures do plainly teach the fact that the advent of Jesus was the time to which Paul looked for the deliverance of the saints, for the gathering of himself and all the others to Christ's presence, and for the placing of the crown upon his own head, and upon the heads of all that really love the appearing of Jesus. He refers to the time of this great reward as "THAT DAY." But he marks it over and over in such a manner that we cannot mistake the point of time. It is not the day of his death, but it is the day of the Lord Jesus.

But can you give a text from Paul's writings in which both the time and the manner of the taking of the saints to be with Christ are presented?

The following text is exactly to the point:

1 Thess. 4:16, 17: "For the Lord himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and SO shall *we ever be with the Lord*."

The word "so" (Greek, *οὕτω*) signifies "in this manner," or "thus." This text shows with distinctness the time and the manner of meeting the Lord, and being received into his presence. It is indeed a testimony of the same character as that in 2 Thess. 2:1, where the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is made the point for the gathering together of Paul and his brethren to him.

There can be no doubt that this was Paul's hope, but can you confirm it by the words of the Lord Jesus?

If a direct statement of the Saviour will answer, here it is :

John 14 : 2, 3 : "In my Father's house are many mansions ; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you ; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself ; that where I am, there ye may be also."

Now observe, 1. Jesus was going away personally. 2. While absent, he was to prepare a place for his people. 3. Then he was to come back and receive them. 4. That thus they might be where he was. Then it follows that they cannot be with him till he comes after them. He will not come after them till he has completed the preparation of the place for them. And observe this fact, if they could go to him before he comes after them, they would find the place unprepared for their reception. Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. Our Lord has fixed the time and the manner of the saints' being received to be with Christ. It is at his glorious advent.

Then how do you reconcile all these testimonies with the language of Paul, quoted at the head of this article, in which he says, "Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better?" The reconciliation is not a matter of difficulty. The departure is by death ; the being with Christ is by the resurrection. These are two events, and not one and the same thing. "To depart, AND to be with Christ, which is far better." We may illustrate this by a supposition. We will say that Paul, when at Miletus, being very anxious to see the brethren in Jerusalem, and to find rest from the severe labors of the field he had, in the face of bitter opposition, so long cultivated, used this lan-

guage: "Having a desire to depart, and to be with James at Jerusalem." No one would misunderstand that language. The departing was one thing; the being with James, another thing at some distance in the future.

Can you illustrate this out of Paul's language relative to the death and appearing of Jesus?

I can give an illustration that meets the point exactly, and that uses one of the very terms of the disputed text. Here is the passage:

2 Tim. 4:6, 8: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. .

. . . Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

Paul's "*departure*" was at hand. This was his violent death by the ax of the executioner. But his reward was laid up for him till the day of Christ's appearing. The word "henceforth" covers the period between his departure and his being with Christ.

But might not Paul be with Christ before the appearing of Jesus, though he received not his crown till that time?

No. If being with Christ would be any "advantage" to Paul, it follows from his own words that he could not be with him till the resurrection. 1 Cor. 15:32. He could not be with Christ on his own showing, as we have seen, until Christ comes after him. "*So shall we ever be with the Lord.*" Besides, this text relative to the crown must not be set aside too summarily. A crown implies a throne, a kingdom, and a reign. Paul will not have these things withheld after entering



his Lord's presence. But the time to reward the saints, small and great, does not come till after the sounding of the seventh angel. Rev. 11:15, 18. We say, therefore, that 2 Tim. 4:6-8, is a good illustration of Phil. 1:23.

But why should Paul speak of these two events, death, and the entrance into Christ's presence, in so closely connected a manner if they are really separated by a long space of time?

Several reasons may be assigned:

1. The Scriptures often speak of events widely separated in such a manner that the careless reader would suppose them one and the same thing; or at least that they were both to transpire at the same point, or very near to each other.

Heb. 9:27: "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the Judgment." But with most men there is a very long space between.

Rev. 2:10: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

James 1:12: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." But we do know from plain testimony that the crown is not given as soon as man falls in death, but when he rises in the resurrection of the just. 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 5:4. As a further illustration of the fact that there is need of care in reading the Bible, that we may give everything its proper place, take this text:

Luke 2:39: "And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth." Now who would suppose that between this performance of all things required by the law when our Lord was eight days of age (see verse 21), and

their return into Nazareth, occurred the flight into Egypt? Yet such was the case. Matt. 2. It appears that they returned unto Bethlehem, and were there found of the wise men. Then, at the warning of God, Joseph fled into Egypt, and staid till Herod's death, then returning out of Egypt he was afraid to stop in Bethlehem, and so retired to his old home in Nazareth. But all these things Luke passes over.

2. A second reason for Paul's manner of expression is found in the fact that his death would close his probation, and make it certain that he should be with Christ when Christ comes after his saints.

3. A third reason is that to him it would be the same thing as though death did usher him into Christ's presence. For there would not be even a moment to him between departing and being with Christ.

Paul was in a strait betwixt two. He was now an aged man, and a prisoner of Jesus Christ. He had borne the burden in the heat of the day. Being bowed to the earth with burdens, cares, toils, labors, and sufferings, he felt that for himself it was better to die; but when he saw the flock of God contending with Satan, and wrestling for life, he felt that it was needful that he should live yet for a season for their furtherance and joy of faith.

Paul rests in the silence of hades. He is not yet with Christ. But Christ has been in hades, and when he left it, took away the key. Acts 2: 31; Rev. 1:18. If the dead should not rise, Paul would have no advantage from all his labor. But Christ shall call, and Paul shall answer. He shall stand up an immortal being. He shall as-

ced to meet the Lord in the air. The crown shall be placed on his head. And "so" shall he "ever be with the Lord."

#### THE RETURN OF THE SPIRIT TO GOD.

"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." Eccl. 12: 7.

This text is the exact counterpart of Gen. 2: 7: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

One text teaches how man was first formed. The other text makes known the process of his dissolution. What God did in creating, death undoes by dissolving. How did death get the power to step in and undo the Creator's work? Man forfeited his right to live by sinning against God. Death entered by sin. Rom. 5: 12. Death, then, has an evil parentage. In fact, it has a bad character in the book of God; it is not a friend, but an enemy; and so serious and formidable a foe is it that its destruction is made the subject of special promise to the people of God. 1 Cor. 15: 26. The power of death Satan himself has controlled. Heb. 2: 14. Death came from the devil, just as life came from God.

God gave to man life, and instructed him that if he would obey him, he should continue to live. Gen. 2. The devil, telling Eve that she should, by sinning, be introduced to a higher life, brought death upon our race. Milton's idea that death is the child of sin and Satan, is strictly true.

But many at the present time believe death to be the gate to endless joys! Death, as they imagine, is the door whereby the Christian enters Heaven! By what means was this door created?

By man's rebellion against God. Who was the chief agent in promoting this transaction? The devil! What does Jesus call him because of this work? A murderer. John 8:44. If death is the door of Heaven, Satan has acted the part of door-keeper of Heaven, for he has had the power of death.

One of the principal proofs that men reach Heaven by dying, is found in our text which is so often quoted: "The spirit shall return unto God who gave it." Does this prove that death ushers men into Heaven? Please consider before you answer. If so, please observe that this text is not descriptive of the case of the righteous only; it is spoken of death as the common lot of man. Then we get all men into Heaven by dying, whatever may become of them afterward. Can it be true that every wicked man is to enter the gates of the holy city when he dies? See Rev. 21:27; 22:14, 15.

But does not this text really teach the entrance of the righteous into Heaven at death? Not unless it does that of the wicked also; for the text is descriptive of the common portion of mankind. The infirmities of old age are first described, and then the dissolution of man in death. The fact is, Solomon is admonishing the young men to attend to the service of God before these infirmities come on which lead to final dissolution. If it were only one class spoken of, it would be rather the wicked than the righteous, for Solomon would not have a young man grow up to these infirmities and consequent dissolution unprepared.

It is the unbuilding of the man after the infirmities of old age have worn out all his strength, that Solomon describes; it is not his translation

to Heaven. The Lord God formed the man out of the dust of the ground. Death causes that dust to return to the earth as it was before it formed the man. If God does the first work, it is not God that destroys it. No; indeed. An enemy is the doer of all this.

“The spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” There is a record of the giving of the spirit by God. When he had formed the man from the dust, he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. Now when death dissolves the man, this very thing which God gave to man, returns. What comes from God returns to God, just as what comes from earth returns to earth. Then what better proof can we have that men are happy with God when they die? Who can deny a blissful existence to the spirits of men in the presence of God? And what will you do now with all the texts that you adduce to show that in death there is no remembrance of God; that the thoughts of men perish in death; that they sleep in silence till the heavens pass away; that they are to be satisfied when they wake in Christ’s likeness; and that if there were no resurrection, there would be no advantage obtained, even by faithful Paul? Do not set these ideas aside too hastily; they are all ideas of men inspired of God. See Ps. 6: 5; Isa. 38: 18, 19; Ps. 146: 4; Job 14: 12, 13; Ps. 17: 15; 1 Cor. 15: 32.

But if the spirit goes back to God, must it not be happy in his presence? And must it not know infinitely more than while the man lived? Those who ask such questions overlook one point in the text, and that point is the key to the whole subject. That which *goes to God once came from him.*

You infer that in *returning* to God the spirit enters upon a blissful existence in his presence. Have you well considered the point? It exists in God's presence after it has returned, with just as conscious an existence as it had before it came from him. No more goes back than came. It is no more exalted when it leaves man to go back to God than when it left God to come to man.

Did the spirits of the dead once live with God, then leave him and come and live with men, and then return to live again with God? It would be very absurd to affirm it. Somebody ought to remember something about living once in the presence of God before living in this world of sorrows. Why not some one recollect about this?

But if that be so, how much better off to have allowed us to stay in Heaven when we were there, than to send us into this world of sorrow, pollution, and crime. To be sure, if this text be rightly expounded by the popular interpretation, everybody gets back to Heaven when they die; but even then how much better is dissolution than creation? How much more beneficent the work of Satan in introducing death, which returns us all to Heaven, than the work of the Creator which took our happy spirits all out of Heaven to live in sorrow, sin, and pain!

The reader will see that there is just as much of blissful existence for the spirit after this life as before it. What came from God to enable the man to live, returns to God when he ceases to live.

There has been one grand act of the Creator in which he bestowed that upon man which at death he takes from him. God gave to Adam, when he formed him, the breath of life, and man, thus formed, became a living soul. It even says, God

breathed this into man's nostrils. This was what gave Adam life. Elihu tells us that "the breath of the Almighty" gave to him "LIFE;" *i. e.*, by giving it to the common father of mankind. Job 33 : 4.

What God gave to Adam was not an angel of glory to dwell in his body formed of dust. If it had been, what a misfortune to that heavenly being! No; it was simply "LIFE." Having made the man, God gave him life. When man had forfeited his right to live, God told him he must return to the ground out of which he was taken. Gen. 3. And so when Adam closed his eyes in death, the great Creator took again to his own keeping that life which Adam gave up. God designs that men shall live again. He holds all in his hand till the hour shall arrive to give them life the second time. Jesus said that he laid down his life that he might take it up again. John 10. And so when dying, commended his spirit, or life, to his Father's hands.

Adam had his life from God. We have ours from Adam. Adam forfeited his right to live or God would never have taken from him that breath of life by which he was made alive. That being taken from him, he had just as much life as he had before it was given him, which was none at all. That which God breathed into his nostrils being taken from him by the Author of his existence, has just as much thought and knowledge as before being given to Adam, which was no knowledge at all.

He did not put within Adam a living, conscious, organized being from glory, but the man being organized out of dust, God put the principle of life in him, *i. e.*, he made him alive.

Our life is from Adam. It is not immortal life.

The facts are too palpable to believe thus of ourselves. Life is transmitted from parents to children. What vast multitudes of living beings perish without ever seeing the light, *i. e.*, without ever being born. Yet they had life. And so life exists in that which precedes embryotic existence. But in all this there is no immortality. We cannot take from the first Adam what he had not to give. Nor can we find in death, which is the fruit of sin, the door back into that Paradise from which sin caused us to be expelled. But, thank God, the second Adam can give us a life that shall never end. "For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." John 5:26. Death cannot convey us to the presence of God; but the resurrection shall show us the path of life, and "so shall we ever be with the Lord."

#### SHALL OUR EARTH BURN ETERNALLY?

By no means. The fire shall melt it. Every part of it shall be subjected to the refining heat. The fire shall devour the earth; but its elements shall all remain. When it has answered the great purpose of furnishing the fiery oven, or furnace of fire where the wicked shall receive their dreadful doom, the second death, it shall, like Sodom, be reduced to ashes by the eternal fire, and cease longer to burn. Then, by the power of the great Author of its existence, it shall be re-created. New heavens and earth shall exist, formed out of the elements of the old thus purged of sin and sinners, and therein shall the righteous have the promise fulfilled that they shall be recompensed in the earth. 2 Pet. 3:10-13; Mal. 5.