

CHAPTER 31 – THE STATE OF MAN AFTER DEATH AND THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

It is noteworthy that this Baptist Confession agrees fully with the Presbyterian Westminster Confession of 1646 (Ch. 32) and the Congregational-Independent Savoy Declaration of 1658 (Ch. 31). There are so many different doctrines about the last things today but centuries ago there were no such differences.

The Intermediate State

1. *The bodies of men after death return to dust and suffer decay, but their souls which neither die nor sink into a state of unconsciousness – they are inherently immortal – immediately return to God who gave them.*

The souls of the righteous, whose holiness at death is perfected, are received into paradise, where they are with Christ, looking upon the face of God in light and glory, and waiting for the full redemption of their bodies.

The souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torment and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day.

Souls separated from their bodies are either in paradise or hell, for the Scripture speaks of no other abodes of the departed.

(a) **What happens at death?** (lines 1-3). There is a separation of soul and body.

1. Human beings consist of *body and soul* (dichotomy). The following verses clearly show there are only 2 parts to humans: Genesis 2:7, Ecclesiastes 12:7, Matthew 10:28, James 2:26. Some have taught there are 3, body, soul and spirit, on the basis of 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12 (trichotomy).

- 1 Thessalonians 5:23 is no more referring to 3 parts than Matthew 22:37. Paul is praying for the totality of sanctification by piling up words which are not necessarily to be distinguished (compare 4 things in Revelation 5:13).
- Hebrews 4:12 teaches the power of the word of God to penetrate (so v. 13), not to divide, for then there would also be a division between joints and marrow in bones.

Note that trichotomy has been used to teach that the body is to be treated by the doctor, the soul by the psychologist, and the spirit by the pastor. It is also used to allow the ‘spirit’ to receive direct messages from God without the mind (part of the soul). It should be rejected.

2. The *body* returns to dust. Adam was formed of dust from the ground (Genesis 2:7), and God’s judgment because of sin is for the body to return to dust (3:19, Ecclesiastes 3:20). Death is always seen as the wages of sin (Romans 5:12, 6:23). It is therefore unnatural.

3. The *soul* returns to God. This is a general statement about all souls based on Ecclesiastes 12:7. Two statements are made about the soul:

- The soul does not die or sink into a state of unconsciousness (‘soul-sleep’). This is the false teaching of Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses. It is true that death for Christians is often called ‘sleep’ (1 Corinthians 15:6,18,20,51, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-15), but this refers to the body which at death looks like it is sleeping awaiting the glorious resurrection day. It is very clear from passages such as Luke 16:23 that the soul is very conscious after death.
- The soul is inherently immortal. Having been created by God it will live for all eternity. It is not immortal in the sense that God is immortal, with no beginning or ending (Romans 1:23, 1 Timothy 1:17).

(b) **Where do the souls of the righteous go?** (lines 4-6). At death the soul is perfected (Hebrews 12:23) because it is entering glory. It is received immediately into paradise. Lazarus was carried by the angels to Abraham's side when he died (Luke 16:22); Jesus said to the criminal, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43); Paul said he desired "to depart and be with Christ" (Philippians 1:23). The soul is "with Christ" (see also 2 Corinthians 5:6-8). It lives in God's presence (Revelation 20:4-6). Yet the blessedness is not complete until the body is fully redeemed. This is what believers are longing for (Romans 8:23, 2 Corinthians 5:4), because a soul without a body is 'naked'.

(c) **Where do the souls of the wicked go?** (lines 7-8). Likewise the wicked go immediately to the torment and utter darkness of hell. After burial the rich man found himself in Hades (here meaning hell) and in torment (Luke 16:23). Judas went "to his own place" (Acts 1:25). The angels that sinned are being kept in "eternal chains" (Jude 6-7, see 2 Peter 2:9). It is a place of no escape, as the rich man discovered.

(d) **There are no other places for souls except heaven or hell** (lines 9-10). Roman Catholics in particular have dreamed up other places, especially purgatory. They claim that almost all Christians must first go here to be 'purged' of sin in order to be prepared to enter heaven. This is a denial of the sufficiency of the death of Christ to purge us completely from sin (Hebrews 1:3, 1 John 1:7,9). It also denies that Christians go immediately to be with Christ at death. They also have invented *Limbus Infantum* for infants who die unbaptized, and *Limbus Patrum* for Old Testament believers before the coming of Christ. So the Confession teaches that at death the souls of all people go to the final place where they will spend eternity, either heaven or hell. The day of judgment will make no difference but only unite the body to the soul in that place. There are no second chances after death. 1 Peter 3:19 does not teach that Jesus personally went to these people in hell, but 'in the Spirit' he went, that is His Spirit was in Noah when Noah preached to them. Because they did not obey they are *now* in prison, that is, in hell awaiting the judgment day. This Biblical teaching is a warning to repent now before it is too late; and for us to take the gospel throughout the world and especially to those who have never heard, for after they die there is no further opportunity for repentance.

The Last Day

2. *At the last day, saints then alive on the earth will not die, but be changed. All the dead will be raised up with their self-same bodies, and none other, although with different qualities, and shall be united again to their souls for ever.*

3. *By the power of Christ, the bodies of the unrighteous will be raised to dishonour. By His Spirit, Christ will raise the bodies of the righteous to honour, for they will be refashioned after the pattern of His own glorious body.*

(a) **The body on the last day** (Section 2).

1. Saints who are alive at the coming of Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 teaches that not all will sleep (die) but all Christians will be changed. The change will be from perishable to imperishable, dishonour to glory, weakness to power, and natural to spiritual (totally controlled by the Holy Spirit, not ghostly). Read 1 Corinthians 15:42-44. Because all will be so changed, those having died will not miss out on anything, as 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 teaches.

2. The general resurrection.
 - “All the dead” will be raised, even unbelievers (Daniel 12:2, John 5:28-29, Acts 24:15, Revelation 20:12). They will be raised and reunited to their souls for ever. It is the final and permanent state.
 - They will possess the “self-same body”. Jesus was raised with the very same body, for the tomb and grave-clothes were empty of His body (John 20:1-8). It even had the marks in hands and side from the crucifixion (John 20:25,27). The resurrection body is physical - Jesus could be touched and eat food. He will call the dead out of their tombs (John 5:28-29). So Paul uses the analogy of ‘seed’ (1 Corinthians 15:35-38).
 - Yet the body will have “different qualities”. Just as Jesus was able to just appear in the room although the door was locked (John 20:19,26). Jesus is the only One we know with such a resurrection body.
 - The resurrection will take place “at the last day”. The 3 passages above about all men as subjects of resurrection naturally imply all will be raised at the *same* time. This is impossible to reconcile with any form of premillennialism, which teaches there are things to happen after the resurrection (e.g. 1000 year reign of Christ on earth).

(b) **The final state** (Section 3).

1. The unrighteous. Their bodies will be raised “to dishonour”. There is very little about the resurrection of the unrighteous in the Bible, all the focus being on the righteous. It is to “shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2), to “judgment” (John 5:29). Even death is no refuge from God! It would appear that as God changes the bodies of the righteous to fit the glory they are entering, so he changes the bodies of the unrighteous to show the ugly and loathsome nature of sin.
2. The righteous. Their bodies will be raised “to honour”.
 - Our body will be like Christ’s “glorious body” (1 Corinthians 15:48-49, Philippians 3:21, 1 John 3:2). All that we know of Christ’s resurrection body will be true of ours.
 - Christ will raise us “by His Spirit” (Romans 8:11); compare with the statement that the unrighteous are raised “by the power of Christ”. This shows that the resurrection of the righteous is a part of salvation, while for the unrighteous it is not. The new body will be “spiritual” = ruled, indwelt and energized completely by the Spirit.
 - The body will be raised “to honour”, contrast to the dishonour of 1 Corinthians 15:43. It is the difference between bearing the image of the first Adam, and of the Last Adam. Honour includes being imperishable, glorious, powerful and spiritual (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). In this condition our fellowship with God will be perfected.