

# On Death and Dying: A Theology of Death – *Psalm 39:4-5, 1 Pet 1:24-25*

**Introduction** – We are all on a journey, and for each of us, there is an unavoidable bend in the road. It is a dark bend and no one is able to see around the bend until they go there. It is called death. The current death rate is 100%. Are you ready? Hebrews 9:27 states that it is *appointed* unto men once to die. You have an appointment. With the topic of death and dying come many questions – questions many are uncomfortable to ask. What do we know about death? What happens at death? Why is there such fear about dying? Is it a natural part of life? Does our soul go somewhere? Is there existence after death? Pain? Comfort? How do we know? This short series will attempt to let the Scriptures answer these and many other questions on death and dying.

**Framing the Questions** (Psalm 39:4-5) – There is an honest question about why life ends and since it ends, what the meaning and purpose of life is. Like a vapor or a shadow, in a just a moment, life is gone. The Psalmist asks God to make sense of it all for him that he might know “the measure of my days.” And it is there, only from and in God, that we can find the truth.

**Tough Answers** (1 Pet 1:24-25) – Peter quotes Isaiah and gives the tough answers. All flesh is like grass. Even the glory of man is like the flower of the grass – it withers, the glory and the flesh, and fades away. Peter then contrasts that frailty to the Word of the Lord which endures forever. Then he says that this truth is connected to the gospel; it is connected to Good News (these verses came from a longer passage, Isaiah 40:1-8). All of this helps us to realize that death is a problem to be solved, an enemy to be defeated.

**A Theology of the Wages of Sin** – Death is the result of something; it is the wage we have earned due to our sin (Rom 6:23a). It is important to begin here. When we experience the death of a loved one, we cannot escape the feeling that something terrible is wrong. Death screams that something is wrong – terribly wrong – with the world in which we live.

**When and Why Death Came** – Death came because God warned Adam that it would if he disobeyed (Gen 2:17, 3:1-7). And so it is for us: “*the soul who sins shall die*” (Ezek 18:4). Because Adam was not only an individual, but our covenant head, his sin and the consequences of his sin, plunged the entire human race into death (Rom 5:12, 19a). And so, even infants who have no personal sinful actions, suffer pain and death. Note: We have to understand the doctrine of imputation if we are to understand how it is that Christ’s life and death, burial and resurrection, can have any effect on us – Rom 5:19b, 1 Cor 15:21-22. We are redeemed the same way we are condemned: by a substitute, Adam and Christ.

**Death: Separation from God** – Even though Adam lived for 930 years as a sinner, he was now separated from God. He hid from God (Gen 3:8) and he was separated from the Garden and the Tree of Life (Gen 3:23-24). Though Adam did not physically die immediately, he immediately began a slow march to the grave (Gen 3:19).

**Three Kinds of Death** – Death/Separation is realized in three distinct ways: spiritually, physically, and eternally.

**Spiritual Death** – This is the covenant separation we find ourselves in under Adam (Eph 2:1), dead in our transgressions and sins. Man can only truly live when in communion with God; spiritual death is the undoing and continual worsening of our condition outside of a covenant union with God. This death pollutes the whole stream of life, leaving nothing “good” in ourselves.

**Physical Death** – This is another separation that now takes place; the body from the soul. It is in the gospel hope of the resurrection of our bodies that we see that this separation is a result of our sin. This also separates us from one another and over generations (imagine: you were supposed to know your great, great, great grandfather and mother...). At physical death, the body returns to the earth from which it was taken. But that is not where the soul resides.

**Eternal Death** – Jesus spoke of a general resurrection, but unto eternal condemnation for those not found in Him (John 5:28-29). Jesus was the original hell-fire-brimstone preacher and the Scriptures speak of an eternal punishment for those whose names are not written in the book of life (Rev 20:12-15). There is nothing in the Bible that speaks of some guarantee that when someone dies they are in a better place.

**Death is Unnatural** – So we see that death is not the result of natural law; it is due to sin (which is also a good argument for 6 day creation and a young earth). It is the opposite of the reward of eternal life and for those who live in death, it is a horrible consequence.

**Death is Fearful** – “*To the guilty, therefore, death is, must be, and ought to be, the king of terrors*” – Hodge. Some are not afraid who should be terribly afraid (Psalm 55:4-5); it is only due to lies heard or told to oneself that the fear is quelled. Or it is due to faith in Jesus Christ – the answer to death and the guilt of sin.

**Death Has and Will be Dealt With** (John 11:25-26, 5:24, Heb 2:14-15, 1 Cor 15:50-57) – The terror of God’s judgment, and therefore the terror of death, are diverted and destroyed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God took on human flesh in the Person of His Son and lived a sinless life. He took our place as the offender before His own law where He suffered for us. For as vast a multitude as He saw fit to call to Himself, these are found “in Christ” in that death – and then in His resurrection whereby it may be declared, “*Death is swallowed up in victory.*”