

## On Death and Dying: Death Benefits – 2 Cor 5:6-8

**Introduction** – We have dealt with the theology of death; why spiritual, physical, relational and eternal separations occur. We have dealt with, when the penal requirement of sin has been paid, why Christians still die. We have laid the foundation of why, even though death is “wrong” and “untimely” and unnatural, we do not have to fear death as Christians. And that is where we will go now. Let us become a people who legitimately have no fear of death and, at the appropriate time, even welcome it.

**WSC #37** – “What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?” “The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves, till the resurrection.”

**Paul on Death** (2 Cor 5:6-8) – Paul was no stranger to death, having been a part of sentencing Christians to death prior to his conversion and having nearly died for his faith more than once (2 Cor 11:24-27). In Chapter 5, he speaks of a confidence (v6, i.e. “full of courage and good cheer” – see also Heb 13:6), knowing that while here in this body he had a sense of being at home, and yet absent from the Lord. Why? Because he walked by faith, not by sight (v7). That is where such confidence came from – and so if he was to die, this would only mean that he would now be present with Jesus (v8).

**Only Good or Better** (Phil 1:21-24) – Writing while in chains, Paul notes that living is wonderfully beneficial for he finds himself “*in Christ*” (v21a), but if he is to die, it will only be gain (v21b). Paul has a wonderful understanding of suffering and the sovereignty of God so that it can only be for the Christian good (now) or better (then). While in tribulation, Paul’s view of the glories to come from death does not cause him to have a “suicide-ish” view of his life. He truly believes that great things are being accomplished (as he notes in 2 Cor 4:16-18 and 2 Cor 12:7-10). At the same time, he doesn’t cling to this life and is even drawn, if only selfishly, to how much better it will be for him if he dies (Phil 1:23).

**Death Benefits** – So what do those who are in Christ receive at death?

**Made Perfect in Holiness** (Heb 12:23) – The activity of death is the final work of sanctification for the believer (as we discussed in detail last sermon) so that believers are now “*made perfect*.” There is no purgatory (a Roman Catholic doctrine devised to accommodate a defective theology of justification by faith alone). We “immediately pass into glory.” Especially since the death of Christ, all Christians at their death are blessed indeed (Rev 14:13).

**Conscious Presence in Heaven** – Those saints made perfect (Heb 12:23) are worshipping. They are “*present with the Lord*” and aware of being with Jesus in Paradise (Luke 23:43). The present life is just the first stage of an everlasting, boundless adventure filled with relationships which will then be perfected. We are told we can only imagine this dimly now (1 Cor 13:12) which is why we must walk by faith. But remember, that faith was not a faith of uncertainty for Paul, but a faith of great courage and cheer.

**Our Bodies “Sleep”** – The separation of body and soul is complete and a dead body is really dead. Nevertheless it will not remain that way and so in one sense it is only resting. Paul uses the language of “planting” until the resurrection (1 Cor 15:43, also Job 19:25-27). And so there remains a hope and even a longing of some sorts for the final resurrection of our glorified bodies.

**Honest Words of Comfort to Comfort** – Elsewhere, Paul tells us to “*rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep*” (Rom 12:15). There are still tears and mourning when a loved one passes through the portal of death. It is right to express real sorrow at the loss of fellowship with a loved one who died, along with sorrow for the suffering and hardship they may have gone through prior to death. It is no lack of faith to mourn deeply over such a loss (Acts 8:2, 20:37-38, Phil 2:27); even Jesus wept at the tomb of His friend (John 11:35). We are to be a people who comfort one another just as God comforts us (2 Cor 1:3-7). And this biblical view of death is a means by which we comfort one another at the death of a brother or sister in Christ.

**Honest Words of Warning to Warn** – Paul was in anguish over those who had rejected Christ (Rom 9:1-3), for he knew that once they died in that state of unbelief, there was no hope for them except judgment (Heb 9:27). There is no second chance, no reincarnation, no annihilation, nothing but eternal separation and punishment (Luke 16:24-26, Matt 25:41, 46). Unbelievers refuse to pray to God, “Thy will be done” and God finally says to them who desire to rebel and remove themselves from God’s sovereign love, “thy will be done.” There is application for everyone then in the warning given in Heb 3:12-13: do not be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin and unbelief. The promise of death having no sting is only for those who are in the One Who took the sting of death for them – and you are only in that One by grace through faith.

**How Then Can There Be “No More Tears”?** – This question arises when we ponder the death of a loved one whom we have no certain hope that they believed; how will there be no more tears in heaven? First, the truth ought to drive us to more openly live and proclaim the love of Jesus Christ and the answer He is for everyone in their sin (John 14:6). Second, there should be sober mourning over the death of an unbeliever, yet trust in a sovereign and just and active God to always do right. Third, in heaven, our eternal perspective will change far more than we can imagine as we will be like Him (1 John 3:1-3). Death is and will be swallowed up in victory.