

July 5, 2020

How Should A Christian View Death?

The Two Sides of Freedom

Virtually every person who is old enough to read these words has been saddened by the passing of a loved one — perhaps that of a parent, a child, a friend, a relative, a neighbor, etc. Each time it occurs we are reminded once again of our own mortality, and deep down in our heart of hearts, we are generally prone to concur with the oft-repeated statement about death being a “grim reaper.” But when all is said and done, we pose the question, “How should a **Christian** view death?” Such is the burden of this article.

But, first, we deem it appropriate to make certain **observations** about death. With this in mind we state that:

1. Death is certain! Indeed, “*it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment*” (Heb. 9:27). Unless the Lord comes first, it cannot be avoided. We must readily concur with the words of Eccl. 8:8: “*No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, and no one has power in the day of death...*”

2. There are certain fears associated with death, as is inferred in Heb. 2:15 which speaks of Jesus having come to “*release those who **fear of death** were all their lifetime subject to bondage,*” There are natural fears as it relates to the pain and suffering which may precede death. Then, too, there is the often fear of loneliness as it relates to embarking alone into the great “unknown.” But without a doubt the greatest fears are of a spiritual nature, especially for unbelievers and those who have made no preparation for their demise. Atheists dare not to die, for fear that they will **cease to exist!** It is therefore not surprising that when the noted atheist Robert Ingersoll died, the printed notice of his funeral said “there will be no singing!” For various reasons, most of us want to live as long as possible. In fact, we sometimes sing the song, “I’d like to stay here longer than man’s allotted days, and watch the fleeting changes of man’s uneven ways.”

3. When death comes, life will have seemed so short! Illustrating this point, we call to mind Gen. 47:8-9, wherein Pharaoh asked Jacob, the father of Joseph and who with his family had come to Egypt after having departed the land of Canaan because of the great famine. Pharaoh asked Jacob a very personal question; he said “***how old are you.***” And Jacob replied, saying, “*the days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; **few and evil** have been the days of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.*” He was 130 years old, and he regarded his years to that point as being “***few and evil!***” But our days on earth are indeed “*few.*” In fact, Job said “*Man who is born of a woman is of **few** days and full of trouble*” (Job 14:1). In contrast, God is “*from everlasting to everlasting*” (Ps. 90:2).

4. Death, in some respects, is so final! We must concur with 2 Sam. 14:14, “*For we will surely die and become like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again*” — at least, not until the Lord returns, when “*all who are in the grave will hear His voice and come forth — those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation*” (John 5:28-29).

Having thus made a few **general** observations about death, we now ask “**How should Christians view death?**” Christians, people who have obeyed the saving gospel of Jesus Christ, if they are properly informed, view death from a **biblical** perspective. And this makes a tremendous difference in their view of and their attitude toward death.

Christians view death as:

1. A Separation, not an annihilation! Illustrating this point, we mention Genesis 35:16-18 wherein we read of the death of Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob. Those verses speak of her “*soul...departing,*” and further clarified by saying that “*Rachel died.*” In Eccl. 12:1-7 the steady journey from the cradle to the grave is vividly and figuratively described, culminating in verse seven which says “*then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God Who gave it.*” In James 2:26 we read that “*the body without the spirit is dead...*” When the body, the “*outward man,*” ceases to be a fit dwelling place for the “*inward man*” (2 Cor. 4:16), the “*inward man*” (the spirit) moves out, and the body dies. Death is a separation, not an annihilation!

2. As the execution of a sentence! God gave certain instructions to the first couple (Adam and Eve), and let them know that in the day they ate the forbidden fruit, that they would “*surely die*” (Gen. 2:17). Nevertheless they ate thereof, and from that time forward the sentence of death has been man’s common fate (Gen. 3:19). It is as stated in Rom. 5:12, “*through one man sin entered the world, and death through him, and thus death has spread to all men, because all have sinned.*”

3. As the gateway to paradise (for those who are prepared). Hence, in Luke 16: 22-23 we read of the death of Lazarus. Upon dying he was “*carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom*” (an expression denoting paradise conditions). For Lazarus, death was **not** a “grim reaper!”

4. As a Departure. The apostle Paul, when writing his second letter to Timothy, was in prison awaiting execution. However, he was not despondent! To the contrary, he said “*I am ready to be poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing,*” 2 Tim. 4:6-8. Referring to his death which appeared imminent, he referred to it as “*the time of my departure.*” “**Departure,**” in that verse is either a nautical or a military metaphor. If nautical, it is likened to a ship being loosed from its moorings to sail the high seas — in that sense being likened to a voyage to eternity. If it is a military metaphor, it is thus likened to unloosing the tent pegs, the breaking up of camp for the final march to eternity.

5. As a “rest.” The apostle John had this to say in Rev. 14:13: “*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.*” Death, for a faithful Christian is herein called “*blessed*” (meaning

“happy”) and a time when faithful Christians “*rest from their labors!*”

6. As a “Gain.” Writing to the saints at Philippi, the apostle Paul said “*For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*” (Phil. 1:21). For that reason he had “*a desire to depart and be with Christ,*” which he said “*is far better*” (Phil. 1:23).

**What Effect Should These
Facts Have on Each Person?**

1. It should move those who are not Christians to make up their minds to become Christians. To become Christians by obeying the terms of the gospel — to believe on Jesus Christ, repent of sins, confess faith in Christ, and be baptized into Christ “*for the remission of sins*” (Mark 16:16; Acts 17:30; Matt. 10:32; Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:27, etc.).

2. For erring Christians it should move them to make up their minds to make the needed correction — that of repenting, confessing, and seeking the prayers of the faithful (Acts 8:22; I John 1:9; James 5:16).

3. For those who are faithful Christians the proper attitude toward death should prompt them to work diligently for the Lord (John 9:4; I Cor. 15:58), to set their affections “*on things above, not on things on the earth*” (Col. 3:1-12), and to develop the courage and determination to press on, never becoming “*weary in doing good,*” always being mindful that “*in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart*” (Gal. 6:9).

Conclusion: Death is not a trivial matter! It is not something that sober-minded people will speak light of. But for a faithful Christian, death is a friend; it is not a “grim reaper!” Friend, how do **you** view death?

*** —B. Witherington