

# The Old Paths

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## “Life And Death”

Ron Halbrook, Shepherdsville, KY

**W**e are more occupied with life than death, but the reality of death forces itself upon us. Death gets our attention because of diseases, accidents, surgeries, and the loss of loved ones. Schools and communities are shaken by natural disasters and the death of young people. The nation focuses on death during wars, assassinations, terrorist activities, and wrecks and crashes involving large numbers of people. *“It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting,”* because death teaches important lessons about life (Eccl. 7:1-4).

How did death enter the world? God created man to live, not to die, and made every provision to sustain life (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:7-9). God warned that sin would bring death. Sin brought death first spiritually--as guilt, shame, and separation from God -- and then physically--as pain, decay, and the separation of man's spirit from his body (Gen. 3). Death was the result of Satan's work and man's choice to sin, not God's design or desire.

Man struggles to understand the seasons and cycles of life and death. Solomon puzzled over the inexorable march of such times and seasons: *“a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill and a time to*

*heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up”* -- on and on it goes (Eccl. 3:1-15). Man as the creation cannot fully resolve the riddle of life and death. *“Though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it...but time and chance happeneth to them all. For man also knoweth not his time”* (Eccl. 8:16-17; 9:11-12). The unanswered riddles and puzzles of life and death test our character and our faith in God.

We can know we were created for God's purposes, not our own (Rev. 4:11). *“For of him (origin), and through him (agency), and to him (purpose) are all things”* (Rom. 11:33-36). No matter how many riddles and puzzles we see, God is in control of the universe and of our existence. Since He made us as free moral agents, we can choose to obey or disobey Him, but we cannot escape the consequences of our choice. Therefore, it is foolish to argue with God or to resist His will. Our defiance will not change His purposes or harm Him in any way but results in self-destruction.

Is death the end? Job observed, *“Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.”* He noted plants are cut down and grow up again, but man does not, and so he posed the question of the ages: *“If a man die, shall he live again?”* (Job. 14:1-15) Jesus Christ is the resounding answer, Yes! After spending three days and nights in the grave, he arose and left it empty. Angels told the women who came to the tomb, *“Be not af-*

*frighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him”* (Mk. 16:1-6). His resurrection is the guarantee of our resurrection, thus we may sing, *“Death is swallowed up in victory”* (1 Cor. 15:51-58).

What happens when we die? The hades world receives our spirit when it leaves our body to await the resurrection. Jesus proved the spirit survives the death of the body to await the resurrection. He rebuked those who denied this truth as *“not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.”* He quoted as proof God's statement concerning the patriarchs who were long dead, *“I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”* This proves the spirits of the patriarchs are still “living” though their bodies are in the grave (Matt. 22:23-33).

In the last great day, all the dead will hear the voice of Jesus and come forth from the grave: *“They that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation”* (Jn. 5:28-29). Thus, it is evident that life on earth is a testing ground which prepares us for eternal life or eternal punishment. Our attitudes and actions are constantly examined by God in view of the final Judgment. What a sobering thought! Can we know what He wants or expects of us in view of the Judgment to come? Or, are we left to speculate about such momentous matters, and to devise our own standards and expectations?

### What Does God Want Of Us In This Life?

As we struggle with the challenges of life and death, the most challenging question of all is this: What does God

want of us in this life? God answers that question in the Bible. He has made it clear from the beginning until now that He wants our love, trust, and obedience.

Adam and Eve were commanded to care for the Garden of Eden, to enjoy its fruit, but not to eat "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" -- a tree which drew the boundary between good and evil. When they ate of that tree, they were driven in shame from the Garden and suffered the ravages of death (Gen. 2-3). Later, God commended Abraham as one who "will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment" (Gen. 18:19). That is what God wants of all men.

The Bible is full of passages summarizing what God wants of us. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13). Our love, trust, and respect for God are shown by obeying His Word. Though God commands formal worship, He also teaches us to translate our worship into daily action. At all times and in all situations, we are to "hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate...let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream" (Amos 5:15, 24).

When God taught the Jews to bring animal sacrifices for sin, He made it clear that "thousands of rams" were no substitute for sincere, daily submission to His will. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. 6:6-8). Life is brief and uncertain, filled with "labor

and sorrow." Knowing our time is short, our prayer should be, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Ps. 90:10-12). We find God's wisdom in God's Word.

Jesus summed it all up in these words:

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets* (Matt. 22:37-40).

All the commandments of God teach us the true meaning of love for God and for our fellowmen. To violate God's Word is to violate that love.

Knowing we have sinned and yet wanting us to be saved, God desires all men to hear, believe, and obey the gospel of Christ. Christ died as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. On the basis of that faith, we must repent of all sin, confess Christ as God's Son, and be immersed in water to receive pardon through his atoning blood. Truly, God "is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should

perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9; Acts 2:38; 8:37-38).

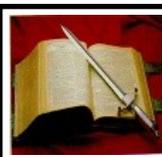
When we obey these first steps of the gospel, God adds us to the church of Christ and then teaches us how to worship Him and how to live for Him each day. Thus, He redeems us from the destiny of hell and leads us to an eternal home in heaven. Ultimately, that is what God wants -- for us to spend eternity with Him in heaven! That, dear friend, is the real meaning of our existence, the final purpose of life and death on earth. Let each of us ask ourselves, "Am I living according to God's purpose and will for my life? Am I preparing to be with Him in eternity?"

**Editor's Note:**

Our gospel meeting with brother Halbrook began Friday evening. He has done a great job, and we expect the same today as we worship the God of Heaven. I hope all benefit from his writings we have included in the last few bulletins. We appreciate the work brother Halbrook has done in the preaching of the gospel.

*"Not to know is ignorance, but to refuse to learn is pride."* -- L.E. Sloan

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**Preacher/Editor: Jarrod Jacobs Phone: (270) 589-4167**