

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS TO COMMON PROBLEMS

Lesson – 15

"Five Questions About Death and Dying"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. When we were growing up as children, we delighted in those stories that ended, "...and they lived happily ever after."
 - A. We all like stories that end with hope and joy.
 1. Unfortunately, we don't live in a world where the final chapter ends with the words, "...and they lived happily ever after."
 - a. Our world is NOT the world of fairytales, but the world of harsh realities – realities like disease, sickness and dying.
 - B. When God created the earth, I believe He wanted it to remain the paradise Adam and Even enjoyed in the Garden of Eden.
 1. But, He also knew the end of the story before the first page was ever written.
 - a. He knew that when Adam would sin, things would forever change.

- b. Adam's sin not only caused him to die spiritually and become separated from God – he also began to age, to move closer and closer toward physical death.
 - c. The original version of how God intended for life to be was forever marred for us all by the sin of Adam.
 - d. **Rom 5:12** – The apostle Paul wrote, *"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned."*
2. Death is now a reality – an inescapable reality.
 - a. It invades the lives of the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the famous and the forgotten, the healthy and the sick, the faithful Christian and the unbeliever.
 3. Sooner or later, if it hasn't happened already, it will invade the lives of those close to you – a mother or father, a son or daughter, a husband or a wife, a friend or a co-worker.
 4. And eventually, it will also invade our own life.
- D. Let's take a few moments together to see if we can answer some very basic questions that are most frequently asked about death and dying.
1. Hopefully, by answering these basic questions we will have a little clearer perspective on this event that will happen to us all – unless the Lord comes first.

BODY:

- I. The most common question asked about death is, "What is it?"
 - A. In order to answer this question, we need to first understand how we are made.
 1. In his closing remarks to his first letter to the saints in Thessalonica, the apostle Paul helps us understand something about our makeup
 - a. **1 Thess 5:23-24** – *"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."*
 2. Essentially, God created us in two parts.
 - a. One is the **VISIBLE PART** – the **OUTER** part that is what we call our body.
 - (1). We all have a tangible outer shell of skin and bones.
 - (2). It is much like a house where our soul and spirit live.
 - b. The other is the **INVISIBLE PART**– the **INNER** part made up of the soul and spirit.
 - (1). This part of us is eternal – it will never cease to exist.
 - (2). This is sometimes referred to the "thinking and reasoning" part of each of us.

- (a). Our mind, our intellect, our personality and character.
- (3). I personally believe – and I believe I can substantiate this from the Scriptures – that we receive this part of our existence at the moment of conception.
 - (a). That should let you know where I stand on the issue of Abortion.
- 2. When we die, there is a separation of the INNER person from the OUTER shell – it's when the spirit leaves the body.
 - a. Throughout the Scriptures, the concept of death and separation are interchangeable.
 - b. When we read of a death taking place, the inner man (the soul or spirit) becomes separated from the outer physical body.
 - (1). A good example of this is when Christ was on the cross **(Luke 23:42-43)**, and the thief next to Him asked, "*Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom,*" Jesus said, "*TODAY you shall be with Me in Paradise.*"
 - (a). The bodies of the thief and Jesus remained on the cross, but the spirit of the thief (his inner being) went with Jesus into heaven.

(2). Another good example is when Jesus uttered His final words, "*Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.*"

(Luke 23:46)

(a). No sooner had He said those words, than He breathed His last, and His spirit departed, while His body remained behind on the cross to be later embalmed and put into a tomb.

3. One way to illustrate what happens in death is to imagine a glove on your hand.

- a. The glove fits on your hand in such a way that it looks like your hand, but it's really only a wrapping or a covering.
- b. Inside the glove is your real hand.
- c. When you remove the glove, it doesn't change anything about the hand on the inside.
- d. In the same way, when we die, we are merely casting off our outer shell that won't be needed where we're going.

(1). This is why the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption." **(1 Cor 15:50)**

- II. The second most common question, especially one that is asked by children, is "Does everyone die?"
- A. Remember the passage we looked at earlier, where the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome?
1. He wrote, *"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned."* **(Rom 5:12)**
 - a. It's a very simple rule -- all die.
 2. But even this rule had a few exceptions that were ordained by God.
 - a. One exception is found in experiences of Enoch (Gen. 5:21-24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:11).
 - (1). Both of these men escaped the experience of death and went straight into God's presence.
 - b. The other exception will be for those who will still be living at the time Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead. There are two important passages to consider: One is 1st Corinthians chapter 15, and the other is 1st Thessalonians chapter 4.
 - (1). **1 Cor 15:51-52** – *"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed — in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the*

*trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised
incorruptible, and we shall be changed."*

- (2). **1 Thess 4:13-18** – *"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words."*

- B. If the Lord returns in the next few minutes, then we will all escape having to experience death – and we will all be changed.
1. Just as the person who dies is going to be given a body that will be fit for eternity, we'll also be changed and given that same kind of body.

- a. The one we have now, was never intended to last for an eternity – no matter how well we take care of it, it will grow old and gradually quit functioning.
- b. It's like a car that's has too many miles on it.
 - (1). The engine loses power because of compression losses.
 - (2). The transmission begins to slip.
 - (3). It get's harder and harder to start in the mornings – especially on cold mornings.
 - (4). It starts to rust here and there, and the seat covers begin to sag and tear.
- c. GET THE PICTURE?

C. So, unless the Lord comes first, we will all go through the experience of having our soul and spirit leave our body.

- 1. That process is called death, and it happens to everyone -- sooner or later.

III. Another important question is, "What about the death of a young child, especially a baby who lives only a few minutes or hours after being born? What happens to the child who dies before they reach an age of accountability (where they are capable and responsible enough to know right from wrong)?"

A. The best answer I can give to this question is found in the Old Testament book of Second Samuel.

1. If you remember the story, David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.
 - a. The heartbreaking consequence of that adulterous relationship was that she became pregnant, but the child of that union would not be permitted by God to live and occupy the throne of Israel.
 - b. When the baby was born and lingered on the brink of death for seven days, David fasted, wept and prayed for God to spare the child.
 - c. However, when that terrible week was over, the baby died, and David resumed his meals and his life – much to the surprise of his servants.
 - d. **2 Sam 12:21-23** – *Then his servants said to him, "What is this that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive, but when the child died, you arose and ate food."*
22 And he said, "While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' *23 But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."*
2. I believe there is only one conclusion we can draw from this passage.

- a. David knew that when he died years from now, he would go to the very place where the child was, and be with him.
- b. Simply – David knew the child was now in the presence of the Lord, safe and secure, and David would someday be there too.

IV. Another VERY common question is, "What happens after death?"

A. What happens AFTER death depends on what has happened BEFORE death between you and the Lord.

1. The destiny of the person who has NEVER come to Jesus Christ in obedience to the gospel of Christ, is completely DIFFERENT from the destiny of those who HAVE.

a. Let's consider what becomes of those who know the Lord Jesus and who are walking in the light of His grace.

(1). **2 Cor 5:1** – *"For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."*

(a). Just as a tent is usually considered a temporary dwelling, so our physical bodies are only a temporary shelter for our soul and spirit.

(b). One day death will tear down that tattered tent, and it will be replaced by a permanent, eternal dwelling made by God.

b. For those who do NOT know the Lord or who are NOT walking in the light of His grace, they will pass away into a place called "torment." We can read all about this place in the story Jesus told about a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. **(READ: Luke 16:19-31)**

(1). This is also the place called "death and Hades," a place of conscious, terrible anguish.

(2). And there they will remain until the ultimate doom is pronounced on them at the great judgment. (Revelation 20:11-15)

c. In fact, Jesus said it best in John chapter 5 when he was talking about the resurrection.

(1). **John 5:28-29** – *"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves 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."*

2. There is a mistaken idea that only the Christian has eternal life.

a. But in one sense, EVERYONE has eternal life – by that I mean that everyone has ETERNAL EXISTENCE!

(1). The difference is where that eternal life or eternal existence is spent.

V. This leads to the final question we want to consider – one that is commonly asked by the rebellious unbeliever and the skeptic, "How can a God of love take pleasure in tormenting people forever?"

A. Unfortunately, this question is unanswerable – because it is full of fallacies.

1. The Bible NEVER says that God takes pleasure in tormenting people.

a. In fact, the Scriptures just the OPPOSITE. Peter tells us, **(2 Pet 3:9)** *"God is NOT willing that ANY should perish, but that ALL should come to repentance."*

B. The only RIGHT thing about this question is that God **IS** a God of love. In fact, the apostle John tells us, *"God is love!" (1 John 4:7-8)*

1. But God is also perfect, pure, holy and just.

a. **1 Peter 1:15-16** – *...but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."*

- b. So when people choose to spurn His love and go their own way, they are choosing to suffer the consequences which go along with that choice.
2. In his book "The Great Divorce," C. S. Lewis wrote, "*There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom GOD will say, 'THY will be done.'*"

CONCLUSION:

- I. Which kind of person will YOU be in the end?
 - A. Will you be one who says to God, "Thy will be done," or will you be one to whom GOD will say, "THY will be done?"
 1. It all comes down to making one of two choices.
 - a. We will either choose to submit our will to Jesus Christ, and truly make Him the Lord of our lives.
 - b. Or, we will choose to have our own will, and refuse to submit ourselves to anyone, especially to God and His Son, Jesus.
 - B. Depending on OUR choice, God will also make a choice.
 1. If we choose to obey Him, He will choose to reward us with a home in heaven.
 2. But if we choose to "do our own thing," He will choose to deny us that reward and allow us to receive the reward reserved for those who chose to "do their own thing."

- C. Death is certain, and it is inescapable – and so is the judgment of our Lord.
1. If you were to die before this day is ended, which category would you be in?
 - a. Those who say to God, "Thy will be done?"
 - b. Or those to whom God says, "THY will be done?"
 2. If you're in the latter category, there's still time to change and turn to God in humble obedience and say, "NOT MY WILL, but THINE be done!"