

Doctrine, Passions, and Practices Death, the End of History, and Eternity

What is Death?

1. Since everyone faces death, it makes sense to consider the meaning of death. What's your understanding of death? Here's Bertrand Russell's understanding:

"There is darkness without and when I die there will be darkness within. There is no splendor, no vastness anywhere, only triviality for a moment, and then nothing." Bertrand Russell

2. But deep down inside we know that's not all there is. And in the Bible, God tells us that's not all there is. Your life has meaning, now and forever. Every human being will be consciously alive forever.
3. So why is there death? Death is the result of sin. As a result of Adam's sin, God brought His curse upon the world. He chose to allow Satan power in the world, sin to fill the world, sickness to spread through the world, and physical death to afflict the world.

^{ESV} **Romans 5:12** Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned--

4. When Jesus died on the Cross, he took upon Himself the curse — the punishment — we deserve for our sin. So when we repent of our sin and trust Jesus, we are forgiven for all of our sin, brought into relationship with God, and freed from the curse. But we still face death, because death is part of this fallen world, and will not be defeated until the end of history.

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 15:25-26** For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

5. So we who trust Jesus should not fear death, because God is in wise and loving control of our deaths, He will use death will bring us even more joy in Him, and He will give us grace to die whatever death he calls us to die.

^{ESV} **James 4:15** Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

^{ESV} **Hebrews 2:14-15** Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might ... deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 9:8** And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

6. When saved people die we immediately enter into the presence of the Lord. We do not have to go through purgatory, because through the Cross all our sins have already been punished. So when we die we immediately come into the joyful presence of Jesus.

^{ESV} **Luke 23:43** And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

^{ESV} **Philippians 1:21** For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

7. What about people who do not trust Jesus? They have rebelled against God (as we all have). But, tragically, because they don't trust Jesus, their sins have not been punished in Jesus. So they must be punished themselves for their sins. The reason their punishment is eternal — infinite — is because they have rebelled against an infinitely glorious and loving and good God. For them, after death, there is no second chance; nor is there annihilation; there is only everlasting punishment. This is why we must do all we can to help people repent and trust Jesus.

^{ESV} **Matthew 25:46** And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

^{ESV} **Hebrews 9:27** And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,²⁸ so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

What Happens at the End of History?

1. Jesus will bring history to an end by returning to earth at His Second Coming. Only God the Father knows when that will be (Mat 24:36). Jesus taught that before the Second Coming Jerusalem will be destroyed (Mar 13:14-19; AD 70); there will be false messiahs, wars, earthquakes, famines, persecution of believers (Mar 13:6-13); lawlessness will increase (Matt 24:12); and the gospel will be proclaimed throughout the world to all people groups (Matt 24:14).



2. Some people believe there will be a rapture, in which Jesus takes the church out of the world before a final great tribulation and the Second Coming. Study this on your own, but 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 seems to teach something else:

^{ESV} **2 Thessalonians 2:1** Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers,² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.³ Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.

3. We elders believe that at the end of history, after an intense tribulation marked by terrible suffering and great advance of the gospel, Jesus will return to earth in an astonishing display of glory seen by everyone.

^{ESV} **Mark 13:24** "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.²⁶ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.

4. Jesus will bring with him all believers who have died, and they will receive their resurrection-bodies. Jesus will also gather to himself believers who are still alive, and they also will receive their resurrection bodies. As a result we will all be with Him forever.

^{ESV} **1 Thessalonians 4:15** For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

5. Satan and his demons will be cast into hell to be punished forever. Hell is not the place where Satan rules; hell is the place where Satan is punished by God.

^{ESV} **Revelation 20:10** ... and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

6. All humanity will be gathered to the Final Judgment. Jesus will be the judge (Acts 10:42). All who trust Jesus have had their names written in the book of life and their sins punished in Jesus; as a result they will be protected from God's wrath and welcomed into the joy of God's presence forever. All whose names are not written in the book of life will be cast into hell because of their rebellion against God.

^{ESV} **Revelation 20:11** Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.



7. Even though our obedience is a gift from God, purchased for us through the Cross, yet in great mercy Jesus will reward our obedience with more joy in Himself for eternity.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 6:7** rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man,⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

8. When Jesus rewards our obedience, we will acknowledge that anything good in us was a gift from God, purchased through Jesus' blood, so He receives all the glory. In this way each saved person will display God's grace forever.

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 4:7** What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

^{ESV} **Revelation 7:9** After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"



^{ESV} **Ephesians 2:4** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ ... so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Passions and Practices

1. Be sure you are trusting Jesus. Don't just try to be good. Don't just agree to truths about Jesus. Trust yourself personally to Jesus as your Savior, Lord, and all-satisfying Treasure. Nurture love for Jesus Christ. Your eternal destiny depends on this.

^{ESV} **Matthew 25:2** Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them,⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps ... Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.'¹² But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.'¹³ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

2. Don't waste your life on what is temporary; live for what will last forever — the glory of Jesus Christ in the salvation of lost people from every nation, tongue, and tribe.

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 3:12** Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw--¹³ each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward.

3. Spare no effort fighting sin. Fighting sin does not earn you heaven. But it shows that you have received the kind of faith that connects you with Jesus who does earn you heaven.

^{ESV} **Mark 9:47** And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell,⁴⁸ 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'

4. Don't lose heart in trials. Set your hope on the joy of beholding Jesus' glory, and understand that every trial can increase your joy in Jesus' glory forever.

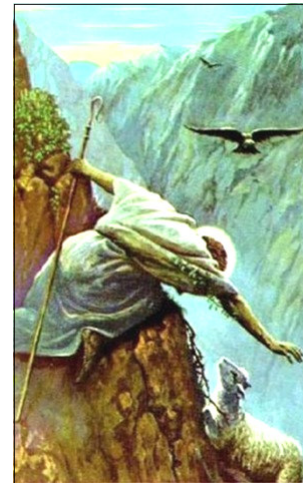
^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 4:16** So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

5. While we do believe in eternal security, God's Word also teaches that eternal security is a community effort. So labor to encourage the faith of your brothers and sisters. Be an active part of your home group.

^{ESV} **James 5:19** My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back,²⁰ let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

6. Let the reality of eternity move you to weep and love and labor and go to people who don't know Jesus. Share the gospel with them. Urge them to trust Jesus.

^{ESV} **Luke 15:2** And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."³ So he told them this parable:⁴ "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?"



7. Cling to the Cross with heart-felt trust in Jesus, because it's only Jesus' blood and righteousness which saves you from God's wrath and brings you to heaven.

^{ESV} **Revelation 7:9** After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ...¹³ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?"¹⁴ I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

For further discussion

1. How have you felt about death? Read the Scriptures about death (p.1, #5). How do they change your feelings about death?
2. Look over the Scriptures about the End of History (pp.2-4). How does the truth of Jesus' return impact you? How *should* it impact you? How should it make us live differently?
3. Read Matthew 25:46 again (p.2). How often are you aware that people around you will live *forever*? How would it affect you if you were more aware of this?
4. Which of the Passions and Practices are you strongest in? Which are you weakest in? What are some Scriptures you could ponder or memorize to grow stronger in this area?
5. What is the Holy Spirit urging you to *do* in response to this study?

For further study

Baxter, Richard. The Saints' Everlasting Rest.

Grudem, Wayne. Systematic Theology, chapters 41-42, 54-57.

Hoekema, Anthony. The Bible and the Future.