



Understanding Death slightly better

1. What is the meaning of death in Christianity?

1.1. What is life?

1.1.1 Spirit and body

To understand the meaning of death one first needs to understand what it means to be alive. The human being consists of two parts; the body and the spirit. Very early on in grief counselling I ask my patients to do this simple exercise with me; close your eyes and see two of you in your imagination, standing in front of you looking exactly the same from the outside. The one is flesh and blood (thus the body) whilst the other one is a spirit being. Now make them merge in your imagination – those two merged is the person that is present in this moment, after that they can open their eyes again.

Most of us know how the body is formed, but then the question of where does this spirit come from arises – the answer is: it comes directly from The Triune God. At conception He blows part of His spirit into the flesh without Himself losing anything or becoming lesser in any way. (See Genesis 2:7) An analogy of how God creates the spirit is to think of a lit candle. If one should take another candle and light it with the flame of the first candle, the first flame is exactly the same after the other flame was created, it did not lose anything or is now different in any way – yet another flame was created from it.

1.1.2 A closer look at the human spirit

The word spirit comes from the Latin word *spiritus* meaning breath, the word *psychē* in the Greek also has a strong link to the word breath – literally meaning “*life in the sense of breath*” – referring to wind/breath *in which thinking can take place and emotions can be felt*. Abilities such as reasoning, emotional processing, thinking etc. are thus functions of the spirit that need to be integrated into the body in order to function as one.

1.1.3 The integration

When God blows your spirit (which is in essence part of His spirit) into your body He synchronises it with your DNA, hence the complete YOU. The brain is the organ that registers what is happening in the spirit in order for the human being to have integrated experiences, thoughts and actions.

1.2. What is death?

1.2.1. Separation between Body and spirit

A discussion on what death is can follow at an appropriate time. Death is when the human spirit and the body separate. The body stays behind and the spirit moves through a spiritual portal to one of two places commonly referred to as heaven or hell. Heaven/paradise exists in the spiritual realm. In this place a person (as a spirit being) is in the direct presence of The Triune God, experiencing His light, peace and love (See 2 Corinthians, John 3:16 and 5:1-8 and Luke 23:43). This is a place of absolute bliss with no pain or sorrows, exquisite beauty and glorious sounds.

The other place called hell is a place where a person (as a spirit being) is in the company of torturing evil spirit beings. There is absolute darkness, lots of pain and deep sorrow, a blazing furnace and devouring maggots to name but a few. (See Matthew 10:28 Luke 16:23)

If a person in this earthly life accepted that Jesus **lived, died** on the cross to take all his/her sins on Him (Jesus) as if He did it Himself and **rose** from the dead to go up to heaven to reign over everything, then the place where that person's spirit will spend eternity is heaven. If a person did not come to believe in Jesus' life, death and resurrection in his/her earthly life then that person's spirit goes to a place where God's grace is absent i.e. hell. (John 3:36) Such a person's sin is then not covered by the blood of Jesus Christ and he/she is taking the punishment in eternity for his/her sins him/herself - as all sin needs to be punished. God has thus provided a way for sin to get punished through Jesus but the choice to believe it or not is up to the person him/herself, (see John 3:16).

2. Burial and death practices

Following a death, Christians mostly choose between 2 options of what to do with the body i.e. burial or cremation. A ceremony is held where a message from the Bible is given to support the loved ones of the

deceased. Often certain people are given the opportunity to express their honouring of the person. Biblically there are no instructions for burial as this is viewed as a transition from one realm to another and comfort is found in the fact that the person's spirit is living on in heaven. Burial practices are largely irrelevant because at death the body returns to dust and one day when Jesus returns all believers in Him as the Christ will receive a new eternal body (the new body won't originate from the burial location or material of the old body – Philippians 3:20-21).

3. Why do “bad things” things happen

The context in which to view bad things happening from a Christian perspective can be explained from 3 angles namely:

3.1 Sin

Satan assigns demons to follow us, lure us into sin and attack people when there is an opportunity. Their agenda is to destroy and devour anything ranging from finances, physical health, mental health, relationships, peace etc. They must however obtain the legal right to do this as they can't go about this in a random way. (See 1 Peter 5:8, John 8:44, Act 19:13-16, 1 Timothy 4:1) This opportunity largely comes from a principle called the *legal right of Satan*.

*“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the **charge of our legal indebtedness**, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the *powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” Colossians 2:13-15 NIV.*

Without going into extensive theological detail the things that give Satan and his workers legal right to do such devouring are usually sin (either those of the individual or a person down their generational line) UNLESS that sin is confessed and put under the blood of Jesus Christ. That sin is then forgiven, taken away and never to be thought of again by God, it is erased from the record books because Christ took the punishment for it by dying on the cross. A simple way to explain it is: All sin needs to be punished – if that was not the case we would not be able to claim that God is a just God. So either you take the punishment (which Satan and his demons are happy to execute) or Jesus takes (took) the punishment on your behalf.

3.2 Testing

Christians and sometimes even non-Christians experience a disillusionment as they wonder why God allows pain, suffering and hardship - especially because they know and believe that He has the power to prevent it. The reasons for going through trials can be explained as follow:

3.2.1. It is a refining process

God refines his children as one refines silver or gold when it is heated to remove all the impurities in order to be a pure form of silver or gold. (See Psalm 66:10-12 and Proverbs 17:3) An example of this may be God allowing financial devouring to teach you that material things need to be a lesser priority in your life.

3.2.2. Spiritual maturity

Bad experiences build character and result in more mature and wise thinking processes. It helps a person to understand life and the world better. Let's say for instance a child grows up in a nearly perfect world. The child excels in school and is blessed in every way we can think of. This child might end up having a sense of entitlement and be arrogant. Allowing a difficult experience will help this child to have a more balanced view of life and reality. (See 1 Peter 5:10 and Romans 5:3-5)

3.2.3. Being a living testimony

Trials and testing can also be put in your way to show the world that you are serious about being a Christian. Something of value will not be easily discarded. The fact that you stay true to your beliefs even when things

* footnote – “powers and authorities” refers to spiritual beings serving Satan

are hard proves that it is valuable. The trials that we face is to prove that you are the real deal and that your mind is made up to serve The Triune God for the rest of eternity, not just because it is the new flavour of the month or you want God's hand of prosperity or protection for your own needs and comfort. (See Deuteronomy 13:1-3 and 1 Peter 1:6-7)

3.2.4. There are blessings in store for you

Sometimes the trials are there as a means to elevate you, once you have endured it, but you need to develop a certain quality in order to be positioned in the blessing (See James and 1:12 Romans 8:17-18, 28) E.g. God allows Satan to bring a difficult thing over your path. Through facing the difficult thing you learn endurance and perseverance. Now you are ready to get the promotion at work which will require endurance and perseverance and the reward of a higher remuneration as a blessing.

3.3. Persecution

Persecution is suffering negative consequences for professing faith in Christ. It can range from verbal harassment to being killed. In many cases being a Christian means to be looked down upon or even reviled. That is something that a Christian should know about and expect. Standing firm, not changing the values and beliefs can bring about this difficulties. It should furthermore be considered as blessing as said in 1 Peter 4:14-16 NIV:

“If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any criminal, or even as a meddler. However as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.”

I often work with my patients to get to a frame of reference called Kingdom perspective i.e. how God sees the matter and how it will contribute to love, peace and hope in His Kingdom as well as the perspective that *eternal rewards weigh up heavier than earthly comfort or rewards*. In being a Christian facing hardships is very often a matter of perspective. When your perspective is healthy you can heal.

A Final Word; To receive EVERYTHING from the Father

Lastly the Christian patient can be encouraged to live a life walking so closely with God that every physical and emotional need is met in that divine relationship. If a person can arrive at this point where EVERYTHING needed is received from The Father they have truly healed. Time spend in prayer (conversation) with The Lord in an intimate way is profoundly healing and I journey with the patient on how to spend intimate time with God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.