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# Doctrinal Outlines

## WHAT IS DEATH?

### I. Introduction

- A. Public enemy No. 1! That's how death can be described. For truly it will slay us all, and at a time of its own choosing.
- B. But paradoxically, although we all know we will die, very few know exactly what death is. Certainly death must be the least understood although most relentless enemy!
- C. Yet it need not remain a mystery to those who will look into their Bibles to read -- and believe -- what God says. For God has not left us in ignorance about this important subject.

### II. The Basic Doctrine

- A. Since life is merely a temporary, mortal, chemical process (with man being made from the physical elements -- "dust"), death is just the cessation of life.
- B. One who is dead has no consciousness separate from his body and feels no pain nor pleasure, but is as if asleep.
- C. Nonetheless, we all will live again after death, after a passage of time, when resurrected back to life again.

### III. The Usual Teachings of This World

- A. Most professing Christians believe that at death they do not really die -- that is, cease to live in any form.
- B. They instead believe that at death only the body dies, and that the "soul" is then liberated to live on in heaven or hell (depending upon the moral merit of the former life).
- C. Others believe in reincarnation, thinking that their soul, which is liberated at death, will be placed in a

new body to live again, with this process occurring over and over.

- D. Scientists who believe evolution seem to recognize death for what it is (the total cessation of life), but they also err because they know nothing of the hope of the dead -- life again after a resurrection.
- E. Even other beliefs about death exist.
- F. Yet, surprisingly, these concepts are not from the Bible!

#### IV. The Bible Teaching

- A. Perhaps the main reason why people, religious or otherwise, do not understand death is because, first of all, they do not understand what life is.
- B. But the Bible makes it plain. Genesis 2:7 records, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Authorized Version).
  - 1. Notice! Man does not have a soul. He is a soul.
  - 2. The word translated "soul" here is the Hebrew word nephesh. It means a living, breathing, physical creature. The word carries no implication of immortality.
  - 3. In Genesis 1:24 nephesh is translated "living creature" and refers to animals.
- C. Further, the Scriptures say dogmatically that the soul can die and therefore cannot be immortal. See Ezekiel 18:4, 20 and Matthew 10:28.
- D. The Bible nowhere teaches that man has an immortal soul. In fact, the immortal soul doctrine was adopted by professing Christianity from pagan Egypt through the Greek philosophers.
- E. But note that man, as God stated, is composed of the physical elements of the earth and is dust. God plainly told Adam, who sinned, "For dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19).
- F. But men do not want to die, so they do not want to believe God. They do not want to believe that man's life is merely a physicochemical existence that will run down and stop -- and die!

- G. Hence, they choose instead to believe the lie Satan told Eve when he said, "You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). They believe that within this dusty body, as a sort of prisoner of the flesh, is an immortal soul that is unleashed at the death of the body and that continues in conscious life forever.
- H. To be sure, man is not merely an animal. For one, man is made in God's image and in God's likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). And man's potential -- that of being born into the God Family -- is far more incredible than the fate of any animal.
- I. Further, God reveals that there is a spirit in man (I Corinthians 2:11) that gives man mental superiority over animals.
1. It is this spirit that imparts the power of mind to man, and the power of moral decision, including the ability to grow in character.
  2. But this spirit is not the man. And it is not an immortal soul.
  3. It is something in man that gives man a dimension of life above the animals.
  4. It does not give him immortal life, however.
- J. To understand death requires that we know that man's life is merely a chemical process involving physical elements. When that process stops, we die. We are dust, and when we die our bodies decay and return to the dust.
- K. When we die, all conscious thought and awareness ceases.
1. Notice Psalm 6:5: "For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks?"
  2. And compare Ecclesiastes 9:4-5: "For him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing."
  3. The apostle Peter knew that even the righteous die and lose consciousness and bodily presence, for he stated: "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead

and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.... For David did not ascend into the heavens" (Acts 2:29, 34). Even righteous David was not an immortal soul that left his body and went to heaven. Even David was dust and decayed back to the elements.

- L. Other scriptures supply even more detail about death, comparing it in a figure of speech to sleep (I Corinthians 11:30, I Kings 2:10). When a person is asleep, he loses consciousness and is unaware of his surroundings.
- M. The topic of death is in some ways unique. Most people will not believe what God says if their senses tell them differently. For example, Adam and Eve did not believe God's warning about the tree of good and evil, because the fruit of it looked good and desirable.
- N. Yet, in the case of death, people will not believe God when He says death is what it indeed appears to be to the most casual observer -- namely, the cessation of life! People will not believe God no matter what He says, whether our senses tell us to agree or not.
- O. But caution! Nothing said here means to imply that death is the end of all hope of life. It is not. An old saying goes, "Where there is life, there is hope."
- P. But God says, in effect, that even where there is death there is still hope -- in fact, the main hope.
- Q. That hope is the resurrection of the dead from death to life again. Notice Job's question and answer about death: "If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come" (Job 14:14, AV).
- R. Realize this: This demonstrable fact of the resurrection of the dead proves once and for all that humans are not immortal souls. If they were, why would the dead have to be resurrected? They would already be alive.
- S. And see further Christ's startling statement: "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live" (John 5:25).
- T. Jesus knew His statement might startle His audience, so He said further: "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 [judgment]" (verses 28-29).

- U. The Scriptures are plain that all people will be resurrected, even those who will eventually be cast into the lake of fire to die the "second death."
- V. The apostle Paul chose to comfort the living relatives of those true Christians who had died by reminding them of the wonderful resurrection to come (I Thessalonians 4:13-18).
- W. To alleviate their sorrow, Paul explained that the dead in Christ will be resurrected at Christ's return, and that they will forever be with Christ.
- X. [ Yes, the truth about death is far less foreboding than the fanciful imaginations of well-intentioned but errant religionists!

V. Key Verses

When properly understood, this topic of death can fill us all with real hope, for then we know the wonderful truth that we will all see our beloved deceased relatives again. Therefore it may be well to note specially the basic scriptures that describe the truth about death. Here are some of them:

- A. Genesis 2:7 and 3:19 -- man is a mortal being made from the dust.
- B. Genesis 1:24 -- the Hebrew word translated "soul" in Genesis 2:7 is translated here as "living creature" and refers to animals.
- C. Ezekiel 18:4, 20 and Matthew 10:8 -- the soul is not immortal; it dies.
- D. Psalms 6:5 and Ecclesiastes 9:4-5 -- the dead have no consciousness.
- E. John 11:11-14 and I Kings 2:10 -- death is compared to sleep.
- F. John 5:25, 28-29 and I Corinthians 15 -- the dead will be resurrected.

VI. Conclusion

Death is indeed an enemy but through the resurrection from the dead this enemy is annihilated. Therefore Paul says in I Corinthians 15:26, 54-55 (AV): "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.... So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"