

# IMMORTALITY

## Our Design and Destiny

A study based upon Loraine Boettner, *Immortality*  
P & R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ: 1956

Surely God would not have created such a being as man to exist only for a day!  
No, no, man was made for **immortality**.  
(Abraham Lincoln, 16th U.S. President)

*And this is what he promised us—**eternal life**.*  
(1John 2:25)

*As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit **eternal life**?”*  
(Mark 10:17)

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have **eternal life**.*  
(John 3:16)

*Whoever believes in the Son has **eternal life**, but whoever rejects the Son will not see **life**, for God’s wrath remains on them.*  
(John 3:36)

*Then they will go away to **eternal punishment**, but the righteous to **eternal life**.*  
(Matthew 25:46)

*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is **eternal life** in Christ Jesus our Lord.*  
(Romans 6:23)

*And this is the testimony: God has given us **eternal life**, and this **life** is in his Son.*  
<sup>12</sup>*Whoever has the Son has **life**; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have **life**.*  
<sup>13</sup>*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have **eternal life**.*  
(1John 5:11-13)

## Mortality

(William Knox, 1789 - 1825)

O why should the spirit of mortal be proud?  
Like a fast-flitting meteor, a fast-flying cloud,  
A flash of the lightning, a break of the wave,  
He passes from life to his rest in the grave.

The leaves of the oak and the willow shall fade,  
Be scattered around, and together be laid;  
And the young and the old, and the low and the high,  
Shall moulder to dust, and together shall lie.

The child that a mother attended and loved,  
The mother that infant's affection that proved;  
The husband that mother and infant that blessed,  
Each, all, are away to their dwelling of rest.

The maid on whose cheek, on whose brow, in whose eye,  
Shone beauty and pleasure—her triumphs are by;  
And the memory of those that beloved her and praised  
Are alike from the minds of the living erased.

The hand of the king that the scepter hath borne,  
The brow of the priest that the miter hath worn,  
The eye of the sage, and the heart of the brave,  
Are hidden and lost in the depths of the grave.

The peasant whose lot was to sow and to reap,  
The herdsman who climbed with his goats to the steep,  
The beggar that wandered in search of his bread,  
Have faded away like the grass that we tread.

The saint that enjoyed the communion of heaven,  
The sinner that dared to remain unforgiven,  
The wise and the foolish, the guilty and just,  
Have quietly mingled their bones in the dust.

So the multitude goes, like the flower and the weed  
That wither away to let others succeed;  
So the multitude comes, even those we behold,  
To repeat every tale that hath often been told.

For we are the same that our fathers have been;  
We see the same sights that our fathers have seen—  
We drink the same stream, and we feel the same sun,  
And we run the same course that our fathers have run.

The thoughts we are thinking, our fathers would think;  
From the death we are shrinking, they too would shrink;  
To the life we are clinging to, they too would cling;  
But it speeds from the earth like a bird on the wing.

They loved, but the story we cannot unfold;  
They scorned, but the heart of the haughty is cold;  
They grieved, but no wail from their slumber may come;  
They enjoyed, but the voice of their gladness is dumb.

They died, ay! they died! and we things that are now,  
Who walk on the turf that lies over their brow,  
Who make in their dwellings a transient abode,  
Meet the changes they met on their pilgrimage road.

Yea! hope and despondence, and pleasure and pain,  
Are mingled together like sunshine and rain;  
And the smile and the tear, and the song and the dirge,  
Still follow each other, like surge upon surge.

'Tis the wink of an eye, 'tis the draught of a breath,  
From the blossom of health to the paleness of death,  
From the gilded saloon to the bier and the shroud—  
O why should the spirit of mortal be proud?

**moulder:** decay; **miter:** the official headdress of a bishop; **steep:** hill; **transient:** temporary; **despondence:** sadness; **dirge:** lament; **gilded:** ornate; **bier:** coffin

\*NOTE: this poem was a favorite of Abraham Lincoln, who memorized it in its entirety. Lincoln was known for his constant depression. His law partner, William Henry Herndon, wrote of him, "If Lincoln ever had a happy day in twenty years, I never knew of it... Melancholy dripped from him as he walked." (Dale Carnegie, *The Unknown Lincoln*)

# PHYSICAL DEATH

(Pages 9-55)

## 1. The Certainty and Reality of Death

“There is a tendency on the part of many people to avoid any serious discussion or even thought on the subject of death. Yet every person knows that in the normal course of events sooner or later that experience will happen to him. Every community has its cemetery. Nothing is more certain about life than the fact of death. It may be long delayed, but it will surely come. All human history and experience point to that conclusion. It has been demonstrated a thousand times in the lives of those about us who have been called from among the living. Heart attacks and other diseases, accidents, wars, fires, etc., have taken their toll. Death is no respecter of persons. It may come to any one, young or old, rich or poor, saint or sinner, at any time or any place. And when God calls none can escape, nor excuse, nor alibi that appointment.” (9)

*Hebrews 9:27—people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment*

“When your parents die, you suddenly realize that now there’s nothing left between you and death but time. It’s like being in a cold Northwest rain and having your umbrella taken away, and the cold sinks into your bones.” (Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian*)

“The stricken father loses his faith, or the broken-hearted mother cries out, ‘Why did this have to happen to me?’ It is hard to answer such questions to the satisfaction and comfort of those who ask it, for the simple reason that at such a time those who ask it are not normal. It is difficult for the mind that is shocked beyond comprehension to be reasonable. The breaking heart wants none of your logic. It wants comfort and peace. Above all, it wants to turn back the page, to recall the life that has sped—and this cannot be. Death is so permanent. There is no recall. It comes to you and yours as it has come to millions of others—it is inevitable. It may come as a thief in the night, or it may approach slowly after ample warning. It may come early in life, or after years of happiness. But come it must. The only way to escape it is never to be born.” (10-11)

### Statistics on death

- 2017 world population: 7,530,103,737
- 55,300,000 people die each year
- 151,660 people die each day
- 6,316 people die each hour
- 105 people die each minute
- Almost two people die each second

1Peter 1:24-25—*For, “All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” (Is 40:6-8) And this is the word that was preached to you.*

*James 4:14—Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.*

A fact from Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*:

If my decomposing carcass helps nourish the roots of a juniper tree or the wings of a vulture—that is immortality enough for me. (Edward Abbey, naturalist, author)

## 2. The Penalty for Sin

“The essential truth that we should keep in mind about death is that it is the penalty for sin. Repeatedly the Bible drives home that teaching. It is not just the natural end of life. It holds its awful sway over us and we are doomed to die because we are sinners.” (12)

*Genesis 2:17—but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.*

*Ezekiel 18:4—For everyone belongs to me, the parent as well as the child—both alike belong to me. The one who sins is the one who will die.*

*Romans 5:12—Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned*

*1Corinthians 15:22—For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*

*Romans 6:23—For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

“The sentence imposed as a result of Adam’s sin included much more than the dissolution of the body. The word ‘death’ as used in the Scriptures in reference to the effects of sin includes every form of evil that is inflicted in its punishment. It meant the opposite of the reward promised, which was blessed and eternal life in heaven. It meant, therefore, the eternal miseries of hell (which is also the fate of the fallen angels or demons), together with the fore-taste of those miseries which are felt in the evils that are suffered in this life.” (13)

*Ephesians 2:1—As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins*

## Understanding the *imputation of sin* (Adam) and the *imputation of righteousness* (Christ)

Romans 5:19—*For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.*

1Corinthians 15:22—*For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*

Also keep in mind...

1. Man was created in the image of God and this, in view of the perfect condition in which the image of God existed originally, would seem to exclude the possibility of his carrying within him the seeds of dissolution and mortality.
2. Physical death is not represented in Scripture as the natural result of the continuation of the original condition of man, due to his failure to rise to the height of immortality by the path of obedience; but as the result of his spiritual death, Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor.15:56; James 1:15
3. Scriptural expressions certainly point to death as something introduced into the world of humanity by sin, and as a positive punishment for sin, Gen. 2:17; Rom. 5:12,17; 6:23; 1 Cor.15:21; James 1:15
4. Death is not represented as something natural to the life of man, a mere falling short of an ideal, but very definitely as something foreign and hostile to human life

### 3. Three Kinds of Death: Spiritual—Physical—Eternal

Spiritual death—

Physical death—

Eternal death—

*Revelation 20:12-15—And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. <sup>13</sup> The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. <sup>14</sup> Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. <sup>15</sup> Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.*

“Those who are born only once, the physical birth, die twice, a physical and a spiritual or eternal death. Those who are born twice die only once, the physical death.” (18)

### The blessing of CHRIST, our Substitute

- His *passive* obedience
- His *active* obedience

## 4. The Christian Still Subject to Physical Death

If we are justified by Christ, why is it still necessary to die?

“The merits or fruits of Christ’s atonement are not all made immediately available to His people, but are apportioned to them in due time, in accordance with the terms of the Covenant of Redemption which was entered into by the Father and the Son before the work of redemption was undertaken.” (22)

Contrast the wicked...

## 5. The Christian Attitude Toward Death

Revelation 14:13—*Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.”*

Philippians 1:21-24—*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup> If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! <sup>23</sup> I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; <sup>24</sup> but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.*

2Corinthians 5:6-8—*Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. <sup>7</sup>For we live by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup>We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*

Psalm 116:15—*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful servants.*

2Corinthians 5:1—*For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.*

2Timothy 4:6-8—*For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. <sup>7</sup>I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup>Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

“Death holds no terror for the true Christian. He sees it rather as the boundary line between this world and the next, or as the portal through which His Lord entered to prepare the way and through which he now follows. He is prepared, watchful, sober, knowing that is appointed salvation is sure, and that when his Lord comes it will be for the purpose of leading him into his inheritance. The day of his death becomes in fact his coronation day. It means leaving a world of sin and sorrow, of pain and disappointment, of toil and hardship, and entering into a far better world, a world of holiness and blessedness, of happiness and freedom and accomplishment, and of direct fellowship with God.” (24)

### **Two things to keep in mind...**

1Corinthians 15:26—*The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*

Romans 8:23—*Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.*

2Corinthians 5:1-14—*For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. <sup>2</sup>Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, <sup>3</sup>because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. <sup>4</sup>For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.*

“We are taught that while death is in itself an evil, yet the joy that comes through entering into the presence of the Lord is so glorious and attractive that we should be willing and ready to leave the body and to be present with the Lord whenever the call comes.” (28)

### Illustrations

- John Quincy Adams
- Two perspectives on a ship that has set sail

“Death is in reality only a translation from one phase of life to another. Far from marking the end, it marks the beginning of a fuller and more wonderful life than can ever be known on this earth. But while we may be afraid of death now, the experience of others has shown that when the end comes if we are Christians we will not be afraid.” (30)

Philippians 3:20—*But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ*

Heaven is our home. Life in this world is only the preparatory school, the staging ground, as it were, to get us ready for the much greater life that lies ahead. God does not want us to become satisfied with life in this world. To that end He sends an appropriate amount of sorrow, suffering and disappointment to each of His children, in order that their anticipation of and appreciation for the heavenly life may be greater. (30-31)

Our Father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns, but will not encourage us to mistake them for home. (C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*)

## 6. Comments by John Calvin

The following are from Calvin’s *Institutes of Christian Religion*, Book 3, Chapter 9:

The mind is never seriously excited to desire and meditate on the future life, without having previously imbibed a contempt for the present.

For the Lord has ordained, that they who are to be hereafter crowned in heaven, must first engage in conflicts on earth, that they may not triumph without having surmounted the difficulties of warfare and obtained the victory.

But it is monstrous, that instead of this desire of death, multitudes who boast themselves to be Christians, are filled with such a dread of it, that they tremble whenever it is mentioned, as if it were the greatest calamity that could befall them. It is no wonder, indeed, if our natural feelings should be alarmed at hearing of our dissolution. But it is intolerable that there should not be in a Christian breast sufficient light of piety to overcome and suppress all that fear with superior consolation. For if we consider, that this unstable, depraved, corruptible, frail, withering tabernacle of our body is dissolved, in order that it may hereafter be restored to a durable, perfect, incorruptible, and heavenly glory—will not faith constrain us ardently to desire what nature dreads? If we recall that by death we are recalled from exile to inhabit our own country, and that a heavenly one, shall we derive thence no consolation? ...This we may positively conclude, that no man has made any good proficiency in the school of Christ, but he who joyfully expects both the day of death and that of the final resurrection.

## 7. Every Person's Life a Completed Plan

"It often seems to us that a person is taken from this life before his work is finished. Particularly is this true when a father or a mother is taken from a family, or when a promising young person, or a much-needed Christian leader or official dies. From the human viewpoint, no life ever seemed so unfinished as did that of Jesus when at the early age of thirty-three he met death by crucifixion. How desperately the world needed His continued teaching and preaching and His miracles of healing! How desperately His influence would be needed in the Church! But His *real* work was not that which human minds thought it to be. The night before He was killed He said, 'I have glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given me to do,' John 17:4. As He hung on the cross, dying for the sins of others, He said, 'It is finished.' From the human viewpoint it looked as though His ministry had just begun. But from the Divine viewpoint He had accomplished that which He came to do. The human viewpoint saw only the external side of His work which related to the people immediately around Him. But from the Divine viewpoint He had accomplished the redemption of His people, which was His real work.

From the human viewpoint how desperately the continued preaching and guidance of Paul was needed in the new churches! But he, speaking by inspiration, could say, 'I have finished the course.' And how they needed Stephen, and James, in the early Church! We would have said, 'Unfinished.' But God said, 'Finished.' And how often today when a young father is taken or mother or boy or girl is taken we cry out, 'Unfinished.' But God says, 'Finished.'

Clearly, accomplishment in life cannot be measured in terms of years alone. It often happens that those who die young have accomplished more than others who live to old age. Even infants, who sometimes have been with their parents only a few days, or even hours, may leave profound influences that change the entire course of the life of the family. And undoubtedly, from the Divine viewpoint, the specific purpose for which they were sent into the world was accomplished." (34-35)

"It is our right neither to take life prematurely, nor to insist on its extension beyond the mark that God has set for it. (35)

- Thoughts on those that live long, suicide, and assisted suicide...

“We seem to separate ourselves from the subject of self-murder in the same way that the suicide feels himself separated from the rest of us when he contemplates the fate he is about to choose. Alienated and alone, he is drawn to the grave because there seems no other place to go. For those left out and left behind, it is impossible to make sense of the thing.” (Sherwin B. Nuland, *How We Die*)

- Consider these reflections by Dr. Nuland. Do you agree or disagree?

“Taking one’s own life is almost always the wrong thing to do. There are two circumstances, however, in which that may not be so. Those two are the unendurable infirmities of a crippling old age and the final devastations of terminal disease.” (Sherwin B. Nuland, *How We Die*)

- What insight does the great Roman orator Seneca provide? Agree or disagree?

“I will not relinquish old age if it leaves my better part intact. But if it begins to shake my mind, if it destroys its faculties one by one, if it leaves me not life but breath, I will depart from the putrid or tottering edifice. I will not escape by death from disease so long as it may be healed and leaves my mind unimpaired. I will not raise my hand against myself on account of pain, for so to die is to be conquered. But I know that if I must suffer without hope of relief, I will depart, not through fear of the pain itself, but because it prevents all for which I would live.” (Seneca, Roman orator)

- Consider the story of Percy Bridgman, Harvard professor 1946 Nobel Prize laureate in high pressure physics...

“I would like to take advantage of the situation in which I find myself to establish a general principal; namely, that when the ultimate end is as inevitable as it now appears to be, the individual has a right to ask his doctor to end it for him.” (Percy Bridgman, in 1961 before committing suicide at 79)

- The Dutch Reformed Church in *Euthanasia and Ministry* distinguishes between *zelfmoord* = “self-murder,” and *zelfdoding* = “self-deathing”

## 8. Making Preparation for Death

“It is important that when we come to die we have nothing to do but to die. Such a one can wait calmly the coming of death, knowing that his sins are forgiven and that all will be well.” (Dr. Charles Hodge, Princeton theologian)

“Preparation come through reflection and discussion.” Agree or disagree?

- Reflection
- Discussion

“Dr. John G. MacKenzie, professor of Psychology in Paton College, Nottingham, England, in his book, *Souls in the Making*, told of a family in England which had lost a beloved son in the First World War. These parents were distracted with grief and as the days and months passed the mother settled down into an unrelieved depression. This melancholic state threatened her mental balance until at last MacKenzie was consulted. He inquired of the father whether they ever talked about the son. ‘No,’ the father told him, ‘that is one thing we do not talk about.’ He stated that they left this topic out of their conversations and tried to keep it out of their thoughts. Then Dr. MacKenzie told the father that the family was pursuing exactly the wrong course. He made him promise that instead of refraining from conversation about the son they would talk freely about him. What do you suppose was the result? Dr. MacKenzie affirmed that there was a complete cure of the soul in this regard and a gradual restoration of happiness.... This but one illustration of the danger of repressing the thought of death into the subconscious regions of our personalities, it haunts us all our days, and as the New Testament states, through this fear of death we shall be all our lifetime subject to bondage. Instead of discussion about death being morbid, it is healthy, and we should learn to talk freely and naturally about it in a healthy state of mind.” (Dr. John R. Richardson, *The Death We Face*)

- How can churches provide a safe place to talk about death and dying?

## 9. What Happens at Death

- A predominant Christian metaphor is to envision death as a “home-going”

*Ecclesiastes 12:1-5—Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, “I find no pleasure in them”—<sup>2</sup>before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; <sup>3</sup>when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking*

*through the windows grow dim; <sup>4</sup>when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when people rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint; <sup>5</sup>when people are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags itself along and desire no longer is stirred. **Then people go to their eternal home and mourners go about the streets.***

*John 14:1-3—Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>**My Father's house has many rooms**; if that were not so, would I have told you that **I am going there to prepare a place for you?** <sup>3</sup>**And if I go and prepare a place for you**, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*

*2Corinthians 5:8—We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be **away from the body and at home with the Lord.***

“No man can stay alive when nobody is waiting for him. Everyone who returns from a long and difficult trip is looking for someone waiting for him at the station or the airport. Everyone wants to tell his story and share his moments of pain and exhilaration with someone who stayed home, waiting for him to come back.... A man can keep his sanity and stay alive as long as there is at least one person who is waiting for him.... But when ‘nothing and nobody’ is waiting, there is no chance to survive in the struggle for life.” (Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*)

“Our Father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns but will not encourage us to mistake them for home.” (C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*)

### **Home Where I Belong**

(written by Pat Terry; performed by B. J. Thomas)

*They say that heaven's pretty, and living here is too  
But if they said that I would have to choose between the two  
I'd go home, going home, where I belong*

*And sometimes when I'm dreaming, it comes as no surprise  
That if you look and see that homesick feeling in my eyes  
I'm going home, going home, where I belong*

*While I'm here I'll serve him gladly and sing him all these songs  
I'm here, but not for long*

*And when I'm feeling lonely, and when I'm feeling blue  
It's such a joy to know that I am only passing through  
I'm headed home, going home, where I belong*

*One day I'll be sleeping, when death knocks on my door  
And I'll awake and find that I'm not homesick anymore  
I'll be home, going home, where I belong*