

Comfort in Theology

FOR THOSE WHO SEE
THE COMPLETION OF
LIFE APPROACHING



By
Charles R. Chesnutt, Sr.

For God so loved the world that He gave
His only begotten Son,
That whosoever believes in Him should
Not perish but have everlasting life.

John 3:16

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“Buy the Truth and sell it not.”

Proverbs 23:23

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Revisions of this work are determined by the date published.

This edition was published on April 28a, 2020.

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This work would not have been possible without the help and unwavering encouragement of my wife, Mary Chesnutt.

Charles Chesnutt
Dallas, Texas 2020

Chapter 1

Comfort in Theology

THEOLOGY IS MORE COMFORTING WHEN IT IS
CONSISTENT

Christians who are facing the end of life can find significant comfort in consistent theology. But theology that is disconnected from reality and the rest of scripture is far less comforting.

Bible verses that have been disconnected from consistent truth are like bricks strewn on the ground at a work-site. They are independent and not part of the structure itself. They demand credibility because they are part of God's Word, but for no other reason.

But when these isolated threads become interwoven into the tapestry of scripture, they become an integral part of a larger whole and take on a credibility and faith that is massive in comparison.

The great promise of Christ found in John 11:25 has become, at times, one of those isolated threads.

“Everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.”

When the Messiah spoke these words He was only minutes away from raising Lazarus from the dead. So His intent is clear. He was quite literally teaching that if we believe in Him we will live even though we die.

But we *really do die* so what did He mean? These are reassuring words, but when death stands leering at our bedside we are compelled to ask, “Does that passage have any

real relevance now that life is essentially over? Shall comfort come from the Christian mantra, “God said it, I believe it and that settles it?” Or do we need something more?

There is a conflict between Christ’s statement and observable reality. That conflict is the difference between Christ saying that we will live even though we die and the brutal reality of steadily approaching real and undeniable death. How does Christ’s statement fit into what we are actually seeing? How can it be true that “everyone who believes in Christ will never die” when, in fact, we most certainly do die? How does the mainstream conservative evangelical church explain the difference?

The explanation offered by the evangelical church of today is misleading. The explanation is simply that we don’t really die, because death in the Bible is not real death at all. Death in the Bible is really only separation from God. So, when Christ said that we will live even though we die, all He meant that we will never be separated from God. So, Christians never actually die because they are never separated from God. In fact, no one ever actually dies. Everybody simply passes on to either heaven or hell and lives forever in peace or in torment. So death just looks like death but it’s only separation from God.

However, this view comports with neither reality nor scripture. There is nothing in scripture that says death not actually death. The Bible addresses the death of the Christian and the death of the unbeliever exactly the same. The difference is not what death is but rather what has died.

So, do Christians really die when they die? Of course they do. In fact the Bible teaches that “it is appointed for men to die once and thereafter the judgment.”¹ Even Jesus Christ died.

But does that mean that Christ was wrong when He said that we would never die?

No. Christ was not wrong. He was not wrong here or anywhere else.

So, if Christians actually do die and Christ said that they don't die, who is right? Both statements cannot be true.

Yes, both statements are true.

How so?

Because there are *two* deaths. The body dies in the first death and the soul dies in the second death. When Christ said that He gave us eternal life, He did not mean that He was giving our bodies eternal life because our bodies are appointed to die. He meant that He gave our souls eternal life and spared them from the second death.

Scripture teaches that the first death is “appointed” to *all* men. So, everyone has to die the first death. So we should expect our body to die, just like everyone else. It is foolish to try to believe that death is not actually death because death is certainly death and it is quite real.

Life after death is not due to death being something other than death, but due to the fact that souls do not die with the body in the first death.

1 . Hebrews 9:27

Souls die in the second death and the second death occurs after the final judgment. This is the reason why Hebrews 9:27 specifies that “it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.” All men will die *once* but not all men will die *twice*.

Not everyone will die in the second death—only for the unredeemed. The second death happens to all of the unredeemed after they have been judged. The second death is the final enactment of the warning given by Paul when he said “the wages of sin is death.”² It comes as a result of the final judgment.

The entire Bible is a warning about this judgment. All bodies die in the first death and the souls of all of the unredeemed die in the second death.

But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murders and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.³

Ezekiel stated it in simplest and clearest terms, “The soul that sins shall die.”⁴ There are *50 scriptures* that give us the same warning. The result of sin is death, spiritual and physical death.

But the believer will be spared the second death. His body will die in the first death but he will never see the second death.

2 . Romans 6:3

3 . See Revelation 21:8 “”

4 . Ezekiel 18:4

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.⁵

Unfortunately mainstream evangelical theology avoids teaching on the second death because the second death cannot be permitted to be an actual death. Death has to be re-defined as “separation from God” because if death in the Bible were actual death, then a far more important doctrine would no longer be tenable: the doctrine of eternal torment.

The doctrine of eternal torment teaches that God keeps every unbelieving soul alive, gives each one of them a new body and then throws them into hell and burns them alive for the rest of eternity. That doctrine would not be tenable if the wages of sin really is death because if the wages of sin is death then the unbelievers would die in the second death and could not be burned alive forever.

The doctrine of eternal torment is a false doctrine. It is a Catholic myth and it is not taught in the Bible.

Here is the progression of relevant scripture:

God has given us a soul.

“Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine.”^{6†}

The wages of sin is death.

5 . Revelation 2:11

6 . Ezekiel 18:4 † This verse shows that the reference to souls is not a reference to people, but to the souls of people.

The wages of sin is death.⁷

The soul that sins shall die:

The soul who sins will die.^{8†}

Everyone, saved and unsaved, will die at least once.

Hebrews 9:27 “It is appointed for men [all men] to die once...”⁹

The soul does not die in the first death. It survives. It is fully conscious; it feels and it can communicate.

“And in hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away... And he cried out and said...Have mercy on me...”¹⁰

The unredeemed soul dies but it does not die in the first death. The unredeemed soul dies in the second death.

That is where Jesus Christ comes in. He paid for our sins by bearing them on the cross.

“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross...”¹¹

In doing so, He became sin for us, so that we could be righteous (without sin).

7 . Romans 6:23

8 . Ezekiel 18:4 † This verse refers to the soul as a soul, not as a physical person.

9 . Hebrews 9:27 “It is appointed for men [all men] to die once...”

10 . Luke 16:23,24 (The Parable of Lazarus)

11 . First Peter 2:24

“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”¹²

That’s why Jesus Christ is so important. He died in our place. He paid our penalty and the penalty that He paid was death, not eternal torment. When He paid our death penalty, He provided the ground for our complete and total forgiveness. He paid the price. The death of the soul in the second death is the eternal punishment for sin, but since our sins have been forgiven, we do not have to be punished.

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be harmed by the second death.”¹³

Instead of eternal death, Jesus Christ gives our soul eternal life and He will later give us a resurrected body.

However, the souls of those who reject Christ will die in the second death because they have not been forgiven and they have not been given eternal life.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”¹⁴

12 . Second Corinthians 5:21

13 Revelation 2:11 † Being victorious means yielding to the commands of Christ (cf. John 14:21,23). This results in the presence of Christ within, which is the hallmark of salvation (Second Corinthians 13:5).

14 . John 3:16

It is the gift of God.

Through grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God.¹⁵

So when Christ said that we would live even though we die, He was not saying that our bodies will never die. He was not saying that death in the Bible is not really death. He was saying that when our body dies, it is only our body that dies and not our soul. Our soul will live forever because Christ has given it eternal life.¹⁶ And later it will be reunited with a resurrected body,¹⁷ just as Jesus had a resurrected body.

Therefore, the scriptural message to Christians who are facing their own death is this: Don't don't pretend that your body is not going to actually die. Your body will certainly die because all bodies die.¹⁸ But take comfort because your soul (the real you) does not die. Christ has given it eternal life and it will never die.

15 . Ephesians 2:8,9

16 . First John 5:11 "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life."

17 . Revelation 20:6 "Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years."

18 . Hebrews 9:27 "...it is appointed for men [all men] to die once..."

Death for the Christian is like an old woman who comes in from the cold. She walks into the warmth of her house. She is tired. She lets her arms fall to her sides and a threadbare old coat slips from her shoulders on to the floor. But she, the real she, walks on and life for her has just begun.

That's what Christ was talking about when He said "He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies."^{19†}



19 . John 11:25. † There is no scripture in the Bible that teaches that any entity will suffer eternal torment other than Satan, the anti-christ and the false prophet (Revelation 20:10); the words "eternal torment" or similar words are not used anywhere else in scripture. The only scriptures that can be used to support eternal torment are those scriptures that are broad enough to mean either eternal death or eternal torment. *Every* scripture that speaks directly to the ultimate punishment for sin says that the punishment is death. Therefore, if sinners are to be burned forever rather than die, death must be re-defined because one cannot torment a dead body—or a dead soul. The Bible contains 50 scriptures that specifically teach that sin causes death and not one of them mentions eternal torment. When scripture takes us to the very brink of the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8), the one Greek word that scripture uses to tell us what is going to happen to the unredeemed (the second *death*) is the Greek word for ordinary death (*thanatos*) and the meaning of that word is no different from the same English word: death: death plain and simple. The doctrine of eternal torment is an error that seriously affects numerous true doctrines and the doctrine of the second death is one of them. See the author's *Fate of Unbelievers* at BIBLEBOOKS.CO.