**Foundations (53 of 60) Death & The Intermediate State - RC Sproul**

What happens to us when we die? Should we be afraid? Or can we have confidence? That's our topic today on Renewing Your Mind. Welcome to the weekend edition of Renewing Your Mind, featuring the founder and chairman of Ligonier Ministries, Dr. R. C. Sproul. The Apostle Paul faced death many times over, yet he was able to say, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

He wasn't afraid of dying. Instead, he longed to be in God's presence. We'll be learning from his example today as Dr. Sproul teaches a lesson titled, Death and the Intermediate State.

Today's study represents one portion of the 60-part series called Foundations, an overview of systematic theology. Now here's Dr. Sproul. We have completed another segment in our overview of theology.

With our last lecture, we completed the section on ecclesiology or the doctrines related to the church, and we come now to our final segment in this overview, and that is the segment or subdivision of theology that we call eschatology. And eschatology is so called because the word derives from the Greek word eschaton, which refers to the so-called last things or the future things, those things that are left remaining about our hope of redemption. And so, we're going to start our study of eschatology today by considering a little bit about the big enemy that we face as human beings, the single greatest problem that we encounter as mortals, and that is that we are mortal.

That is that we at some point have to deal with death. Death is the final enemy, we are told, that we have to deal with. And the question that everybody asks is the question that was first asked by Job in the ancient world, if a man dies, will he live again? Or, to put it another way, is there life after death, or what happens to us when this mortal body goes through the transition that we call death? I mean, that is always on everybody's mind.

It may be tucked back in a far corner of the mind, but we are aware of our mortality, and that specter, that enemy of death standing out there facing us always tends to take a little of the joy away from our present experiences and always seems to be threatening us with something bad. And the question is, has that enemy finally, once and for all, been defeated? And what does death mean for the Christian? Well, let's begin our brief examination of this question by looking at some things that the Apostle Paul says in his letter to the Romans. In chapter 5 of Romans, beginning at verse 12, Paul says this, Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, he's referring, of course, to Adam, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men because all sinned.

For until the law, sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses. Now this is significant.

Paul is giving an important theological point here. He's saying, was there sin before Moses, before the law was given? And Paul said, yes, there was sin before the law was given through Moses. How do we know that? What's Paul's argument? He said, we know that there was law in the world before Moses came because there was something else in the world, and what was it? Death.

He said, because without the law there is no sin, because sin by definition is a transgression of the law, and without sin there can be no death, and since there was death, that proves there had to be sin, and if there was sin, that proves there had to be law, and he's talking about that law that God had revealed inwardly to human beings from the very beginning. But Paul is saying that this problem, this enemy, this death came into the world as a direct result of sin. Now at that point, the Christian is placed on a collision course with secular thinking in our day, which sees death as simply part of the natural order of things, whereas the Christian sees death as part of the natural fallen order of things, but was not the original state of man, that death came as God's judgment on sin, and at the beginning, all sin was a capital offense.

The soul that sins shall die, and he said to Adam and Eve, the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die. Now when God was saying that, He was not threatening Adam and Eve simply with spiritual death. Now obviously, the day they transgressed the law of God in the garden, they died spiritually.

They did not die physically, and so one asks the question, well what did He mean when He said the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die? Well what He meant was, the day that you eat of that, you're done. You're going to die, not just in your soul, not just in your spirit, but you're going to die, you're going to have thanatos, you're going to undergo what we call biological death. That was the warning.

That was the penalty, that Adam and Eve did not die physically the day that they sinned. It was not because God was a liar, but because God always, when He gives warnings for the consequences of sin, reserves to Himself the right to grant mercy, or to be gracious. And what He did was He granted Adam and Eve the grace to live for some time in this world before He would exact the penalty for their sin, which was death.

Every human being in this world is a sinner, and every human being in this world has been sentenced to death, and every human being in this world is on death row. That's where we are as human beings. We're waiting for the hammer to fall, for the sentence to be carried out.

However, from the Christian perspective, death is no longer seen simply as the punishment or the penalty for sin, because the penalty for sin has been paid by Christ. Now, death has a whole different significance. Now, death is a moment of transition from this world to the next.

Now, let's take a look at what Paul says later on to the Philippians. Chapter 1 of Paul's letter to the Philippians, in the 19th verse, here's what he says, For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed. But with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor. Yet what I shall choose I cannot tell, for I am hard-pressed between the two.

Having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better, nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. Now, here Paul makes some very important value judgments about death. And if there's anything that we read in the New Testament that our faith staggers at, it's this statement that Paul gives here.

Because even though we say we believe, and we celebrate Easter, and we rejoice in Christ's victory over the grave, we're still afraid of death. Now, I have to say in all honesty to you, to the best of my knowledge, I don't think I'm afraid of death. But also, to the best of my knowledge, I'm very much afraid of dying.

In other words, it's not what happens when I breathe my last breath that has me afraid. It's the process that I may have to go through, because there's no guarantee that the Christians aren't going to have to go through a lot of pain and a lot of anguish on the way out. The only guarantee we have is the presence of God with us in the midst of it, and also the guarantee we have of where we go when our eyelids close in death.

And what Paul says is this, for me to live is Christ, to die is gain. The apostles turned the world upside down, and the chief world turner upside down was Paul. Apart from Jesus, I can think of no more extraordinary life that was lived by any Christian since Christ than the life of the apostle Paul.

I mean, when we look at what he accomplished in his life, what he endured in his life, what he suffered in his life, it's just absolutely astonishing what this man did. And yet, you couldn't have a Paul unless you had a man who was as passionately convinced of the truth of his eternal life than Paul was. Paul didn't care whether he died the next minute.

He risked his life and limb every minute because he said, as long as I'm alive, it's Christ. I'm serving Christ, and if I die, it only gets better. It's gain for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Whenever we see somebody who's undergone the death of a family member or a loved one, we send them cards of condolences, and we say, we're sorry about your great loss. And when somebody dies, it is a loss for us. There's no question about it.

But if they're a Christian, it is not a loss for them. It is a gain. It's on the positive side of the ledger.

Now, Paul reinforces this in this same context here where he says, a couple of verses later, I am hard-pressed between the two, hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ or to stay in the flesh which is more needful for you. So, he has this dilemma. He said, I look at my ministry, I look at the churches out there, and I know that I have a job to do to help you grow into the fullness.

I don't want to be taken out of this battle. I want to be able to continue to minister to you and see you home. I have a great desire to continue this earthly ministry, and I think it's necessary for you that I stay around for a while, is what he's saying.

And so, I'm in a fix here. I'm in a straight between two things. I'm in a real, on the horns of a dilemma.

He said, on the one hand, I really want to stay with you and help you. On the other hand, my heart's in heaven. On the other hand, I can't wait to go home because I left some words out when I read it this time.

I'm in a straight between two things, to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Now, we have a tendency to look at the difference between life and death as the difference between good and bad. That's not how the apostle looked at it.

He looked at the difference between life and death as the difference between the good and the better. He said, living is good. I mean, there's a lot of pain in life.

This place is a veil of tears, and I can understand sometimes when some people are reduced to such a level of suffering and pain that they really want to die. But most of us, despite the aches and the pains, the heartbreaks, the disappointments, the frustrations that assault us every day in this life, all those things put aside, we still want to live. I mean, we want to live.

There is a joy of living, a sense in which we hold on tenaciously to life, because even with all the pains and the frustrations and the disappointments, life is a wonderful thing. It's an incredible thing. Just think about it.

What it means to be alive. What it means to be a living, breathing human being. Paul says, for me to live in Christ, and it's good if I stay here, not bad, but to depart and be with Christ is not just a difference between the good and the better.

It's the difference between the good and the far better. Not just better, far better. I mean, it's a quantum leap of goodness for the Christian to die, because we go immediately to be with Christ.

That's not just an empty hope, but that's a hope that has been verified by Christ's own resurrection in real history, which Paul saw with his own eyes. Now, maybe the reason we're not as bold, as courageous, and as effective as the apostle Paul is that we haven't seen with our own eyes what he saw with his own eyes. There weren't any doubts in Paul's mind about whether he was headed for heaven, or whether there was a resurrected Christ.

He knew that. And he said, I'll risk anything in this world, because it doesn't matter what happens to this body, because I'm going home. Now, the first question we face in eschatology with respect to death is what happens to us when we die? Because the Bible teaches that there is death, and the Bible also teaches that there is a final resurrection.

In the Apostles' Creed, we say, resurrectionus carnus. Resurrectionus carnus. I'm testing my Latin students here.

I believe in the resurrection of the body. And when we say that we believe in the resurrection of the body, we are not saying that we believe in the resurrection of Jesus' body. Of course we believe in that.

But the reference to the phrase the resurrection of the body in the Apostles' Creed refers to our faith in the resurrection of our bodies. We believe that though our bodies undergo this thing that we call thanatos, or death, that that body, which may be destroyed by a bomb, burned up in a fire, or buried in a hole in the ground, that someday those bones are going to rise again, that just as Christ came out of the tomb with the same body He went into the tomb with, though He came out with that same body, that same body had been dramatically altered. It had been glorified.

It had been changed from mortal to immortal, and so on. So, in 1 Corinthians 15, the Apostle says that just as Christ came with a new body, He came as the first fruits of those who were raised from the dead, that we also will be raised by our bodies. And he says, you know, by what body will they come out? I don't know.

I don't know if I'm going to have gray hair in heaven. I don't know if I'm going to be overweight in heaven. I hope not, and I don't know what I'm going to look like, and I don't know what you're going to look like, but I know that there's going to be recognition, and I know that it's not going to be just a wandering spirit or ghostly soul running around.

We are going to have recognizable bodies, because that's the final promise, so that the best state in the future is the glorified body. Living in the body now, here on earth, is good. The best is the glorified body in our final estate.

The much better is what we say is what takes place in what we call in theology the intermediate state. The intermediate state is that state of existence in which we find ourselves between the time of our death and the time of the final resurrection of the body. And presumably, when I die, my body goes in the grave.

My soul goes directly to heaven. To be immediately in the presence of Jesus Christ, which is far better than the existence that I have in this world. But I will be a soul without a body.

The best of all possible situations will occur even later in the consummation of the kingdom of Christ when my soul will take upon itself another body that is imperishable and glorified. But the point here is, this doesn't mean, as some heretics have taught, that when we die, we enter into what's called soul sleep, where you're in a state of suspended animation and personal unconsciousness and unaware of the passing of time, and you stay in that state until the great resurrection. But in the meantime, you are separated from Christ in a very real sense.

You may not be aware of it, but you are. Where the biblical view is a view that teaches the unbroken continuity of personal existence, of personal conscious existence. So, the second you die, you may be unconscious when you die.

The second you die, you're awake, because you will now be in a state of personal, conscious existence in the presence of Christ and in the presence of God, which is a magnificent thing to anticipate. And so, I'm fixing to live forever. I don't plan to ever die.

I plan to go through a biological, physiological transition where this body wears out as it is currently wearing out. You know, my wife was saying to me yesterday, she said, I feel like I'm 40 years old. I said, that's because it's in your mind.

It's because your inner person, that self that lives in this outward body, is still alert and aware. You know, you're not really conscious of how much you have aged physically. And where do you really live? You really live inside yourself, in your mind, in your spirit, in your soul.

That personal continuity of consciousness continues, only in a much greater state, because it's in the immediate presence of Christ. So, Paul's dilemma was answered with the victory of his death, where he could go home and receive and experience the gain of being with Christ. For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

The words of the Apostle Paul. The title of today's lesson is Death and the Intermediate State, and our teacher is the founder and chairman of Ligonier Ministries, Dr. R.C. Sproul. This is Renewing Your Mind.

Dr. Sproul mentioned that today's lesson is the beginning of a new sub-series of systematic theology called Eschatology, or Last Things. We have focused on systematic theology for the last few months in a series titled Foundations, and we're coming toward the end of this study. Over the next few weeks, we'll hear lessons on the resurrection, the kingdom of God, and the millennium.

And then we'll move on to a new study. Sixty lessons are in this study called Foundations. That makes it one of the largest series we've ever produced, and you can request the entire set on DVD when you contact us today with a donation of any amount.

I'll share our contact information in just a moment. I mentioned that this is a DVD series, but when you request Foundations, an overview of systematic theology, you will also receive a complete package of resources. You'll get the DVDs, of course, but you'll also receive a CD-ROM with the audio from all 60 messages.

And we will include a 130-page printable study guide as well. Give a donation of any amount and request Foundations when you call 1-800-435-4343 or online go to rymoffer.com. This offer is for today only. Studying systematic theology in seminary usually requires poring over large textbooks, and that can prove overwhelming if you try to do that on your own.

We created Foundations to serve as an introduction to systematic theology. It's something you can absorb without feeling overwhelmed. This series is broken up into 60 stand-alone lessons that you can study at your own pace.

And each lesson is taught in front of a live audience of Bible students just like you and me, so you won't hear jargon or confusing academic terms. You likely heard Dr. Sproul writing on a chalkboard in today's lesson. Well, when you request the DVDs, you'll be able to see what he's writing.

Again, ask for Foundations on DVD when you give your donation. And you'll also receive the CD-ROM containing all of the audio and a printable study guide as well. Call 1-800-435-4343 or go to rymoffer.com. Will we recognize our friends in heaven? What will our glorified bodies look like? Dr. Sproul addresses these questions in a lesson on the resurrection.

I'm Lee Webb, inviting you to join us again next weekend for Renewing Your Mind.