Systematic Theology #7: 
Death, Resurrection, Judgment 

THE DOCTRINE OF DEATH 

1. The following are three things the Bible says about death. 

   • Everyone will die and face a personal judgment. 
     
     Hebrews 9:27 (ESV) [i]t is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment... 
     
     The Scriptures teach against the possibility of reincarnation. 

   • Everyone will face a personal judgment of either damnation or salvation (Romans 2:6-11; John 5:28-29). 
     
     Romans 14:10–12 (ESV) For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. 

   • Everyone can know in this life what their final state will be. 
     
     John 3:36 (ESV) Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. 

2. Scripture speaks of physical death. 

   • When the first humans rebelled against God, they forfeited their access to immortality (the Tree of Life) and were condemned to die (Genesis 3; Romans 5:12). 
     
     Physical death is both a judgment and an act of mercy by God, because death puts an end to the sins that a person may commit here on earth. Death underscores the limits of humanity’s rebellion against God. 

   • Physical death is not the cessation of personal consciousness.
Jesus himself taught this in the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, both of whom continue to experience personal consciousness following death (Luke 16:19-31).

3. Scripture also speaks of spiritual death.

- Because of our inherited sin nature, everyone is born into a state of spiritual death, separated from God and in need of spiritual regeneration.

  Ephesians 2:1–2 (ESV) And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience...

4. Scripture ominously speaks of eternal death.

- Eternal death is the destiny of everyone who is spiritually dead at the time of their physical death.

  Jesus warned of the danger of eternal punishment (Mt 25:46). The apostle John referred to it as “the second death” (Rv 21:8).

  Revelation 20:14–15 (ESV) Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

- Eternal death is irreversible.

  Matthew 25:46 (ESV) And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

- Eternal death is not annihilation. It is not the cessation of existence, but an existence of never ending suffering.

  Jesus is recorded by Matthew as describing eternal death no less than six times as a place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).

  Luke 16:22–24 (ESV) The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out,
'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.'

- Eternal death is self-chosen by virtue of the fact that people rejected God in this life.

**THE DOCTRINE OF RESURRECTION**

1. All the dead will be resurrected. (Acts 24:15)

   *Acts 24:15 (ESV) [T]here will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.*

   Because the Scriptures are not entirely clear, Christians generally hold to one of two views regarding the future resurrection. Some understand the Scriptures to teach that there will only be one resurrection, which will take place at the time Jesus returns bodily to the earth. This resurrection leads directly to the Final Judgment at which time everyone will either enter into eternal salvation or eternal punishment. Others understand the Scriptures to teach that there will be two resurrections. First, the righteous will be resurrected and will reign with Christ on the earth for a long period of time (1000 years, whether that be literal or symbolic). Then at the end of this period, all the rest of humanity will be resurrected and will face their Final Judgment.

2. It will be a bodily resurrection like Jesus’s own resurrection.

   *Philippians 3:20–21 (ESV) [W]e await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*

   Jesus’s resurrected body is described as “flesh and bones” with scarred hands, feet, and side, capable of eating and drinking normal food and drink. (Lk 24:39-43; Jn 20:20ff; Ac 1:4; 10:41).

3. Christians will receive glorious bodies. Paul describes them as follows in 1 Corinthians 15:35-54.

   - Heavenly (v. 40)
   - Incorruptible, or imperishable (v. 42)
   - Glorious, or radiant, or full of splendor (v. 43)
   - Powerful, or mighty, or strong (v. 43)
• Spiritual (i.e., of the Spirit of God) (v. 44)
• Not natural (literally, soulical; i.e. of the human soul) (v. 44)
• Immortal, or deathless (v. 53)

“Heavenly” doesn’t mean the resurrected body is not material. Jesus has a “heavenly” body, but he ate normal food and drink with it, and others could touch it. Likewise, “spiritual” doesn’t mean the resurrected body is not material. Paul’s contrast is between a body “of the soul” and a body “of the spirit.” This contrasts our present bodies, which are animated primarily by our sin-stained souls, and our future bodies, which will be animated by the Spirit of God and our own sinless spirit.

THE DOCTRINE OF JUDGMENT

1. God is the great Judge who will sit in judgment over every person.

   James 4:12 (ESV) There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy...

2. His judgments are true and just, because he is omniscient and righteous.

   Revelation 16:5–7 (ESV) And I heard the angel...say, “Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments...” And I heard the altar saying, “Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!”

3. Jesus will carry out God’s judgment on everyone who has ever lived.

   Acts 10:42 (ESV) And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.

   2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

4. People will be judged for every aspect of their lives; nothing will remain hidden.

   • Their deeds (Rv 20:12-13; Ro 2:6; Mt 16:27)
   • Their words (Mt 12:36-37; Lk 12:3)
• Their thoughts (Hb 4:12; Mt 9:4)
• Their attitudes and motives (1 Cor 4:2-5; Hb 4:12)

1 Corinthians 4:5 (ESV) *(Jesus) will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.*

5. The righteous will receive eternal life, but the unrighteous will receive eternal punishment.

Romans 2:6–8 (ESV) *(God) will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.*

6. Those who are in Christ will not experience God’s wrath.

1 Thessalonians 5:9 (ESV) *For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ...*

7. Believers will be rewarded for their good deeds (Mt 25:31-40).

**DISCUSSION QUESTION**

1. Why is it important to think about all three aspects of death (physical, spiritual, eternal)?

2. Why is the doctrine of resurrection central to the Christian hope?

3. Even though believers aren’t destined for wrath, why should we give sober thought to the fact that we will one day face God’s judgment?

**HOMEWORK**

1. Review the Scriptures used in this lesson, and spend some time in thoughtful reflection and prayer about the truths they teach. Then write a brief summary of how this lesson and the biblical texts have impacted you.