

## **Christ's Death And The Immortality Of The Soul**

### **The Purpose of Christ's Death**

**John W. Ritenbaugh**

**Given 27-Mar-04; Sermon #657**

This sermon that I am giving today at first glance may not appear to fit into the series I began giving three sermons ago, but it indeed does, because it involves one of the doctrines the Barna poll found was commonly rejected by those polled. Thirty percent of those polled rejected Christ's resurrection from the dead.

This message fits a dual role, because it fits into this pre-Passover period of self-examination, and is a reminder of an issue very important to growth and to salvation itself.

Genesis is a book of beginnings. The foundations for understanding are laid within its pages—things important to getting us moving in the right direction. Genesis 1:1 contains the beginnings of a physical creation, including the heavens and the earth, but this is only the first of many beginnings that are factors impacting on this way of life.

The beginning of human life through Adam and Eve is among the first of those significant occurrences. A little bit later the chapters on Babylon in Geneses 10 and 11 provide the story for the beginnings of the world apart from God, and apart from Israel. One chapter later, Genesis 12, the beginning of the Israelitish people through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is established.

Of very great importance is that Genesis contains the beginnings of God's spiritual creation, and also readily understood is that it contains the record of mankind's first sin. But perhaps somewhat overlooked is that it contains the beginnings of *all* apostasy, false religion, pain, and death.

Apostasy, false religion, pain, and death began when the Serpent induced Adam and Eve to take the forbidden fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil by convincing them that they already had an immortal soul. "You shall not surely die," the Serpent said with great emphasis.

Are you aware that in this sin the Serpent managed to convince them to deify themselves, and that self-deification is the heart and core of all worship of Satan? "You shall be as gods, knowing good and evil," he said. He was inviting them to set the standards of morality for themselves. And they did! This is the same basic process these people Barna reported on used. They reject portions of God's Word on their own authority, thus establishing their own code of belief and morality.

Are you aware that the adherence of virtually *every* religion (in fact in one source that I read said *all* religion) on the face of the earth believes they already have immortality at birth?

This first lie in all of human experience, after the passage of time, has become a major part of a foundation and cornerstone of all of paganism. It became "*the lie*" that sits at very much of the departure from God's way. This is not to say that everybody has believed it, but it has nonetheless dominated the spiritual thinking of virtually all religions apart from the faithful descendants of Abraham who know and believe the truth, and therefore conduct their lives accordingly.

After Jesus rose from the dead and began the church and departed to heaven, this evil doctrine infiltrated into the church even during the lifetimes of the apostles through false conversions of people dominated by Gnostic teachings. Today, in our time, this notion that one already has an immortal soul at birth is taken for granted by the vast majority calling themselves Christian. These people expect that at their death their soul departs from their body, but that they will retain consciousness as it goes off into heaven, hell, or purgatory.

This last statement of mine does not stand alone in apostate pagan thought. It has been surrounded and supported by an elaborate philosophy, collated, systemized, taught, and practiced primarily by Greek philosophers and their disciples before Christ was even born.

The description of that philosophy remains for another day and in another sermon. In this sermon I want to cut right to the chase, because this doctrine, even as it was with Adam and Eve, is a prime motivator to sin, and thus death, as it subtly undermines the desire and effort to do well by following the way of God.

**Genesis 3:1** Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yes, has God said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

Now there was the original teaching. That was *the word of God* to Adam and Eve.

**Genesis 3:2-4** And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die. And the serpent said unto the woman, You shall not surely die.

There is the new teaching.

I think we understand that God uses an economy of words in His Book in order to get right to the point in showing cause and effect. The false teaching that they would not die immediately produced another sin, because they believed it—"You shall not surely die," rather than what God said. It was sin's motivator.

I do not know how thoroughly they went through the process of thinking this through before actually physically making the choice. However, the sum of this is they no longer considered taking of the Tree of Life as being all that necessary. There is no doubt that they no longer believed God on this point. Maybe they believed everything else that He had taught them, but on this

one point they took the first step off the path. It appears that they did it because they were assured by a false teaching that if they *did* take of that tree, they would not die.

There is no doubt that their faith was undermined by the new belief which implied very strongly that they were already immortal, and if they would not die, what else can the serpent's statement imply? That is the only conclusion that one can come to, if we believe it.

**Genesis 2:17** But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die.

In searching through commentaries I found that this statement—"You shall not eat of it"—is the strongest form of prohibition available in the Hebrew language. Just in terms of speaking, God could not have said it anymore strongly that He did. What is so interesting is that Satan repeated that very emphatic prohibition in Genesis 3:4, but he cleverly turned it into a positive implication that supported *his* view of it.

It is true that they did not die immediately, but *die they did*, and that is God's point. In like manner, we can sin too, and *we* do not die immediately either. Is it possible that we have been deceived, and fall into the same trap as Adam and Eve did? And so the question is, do we get the point that apparently they missed in God's instruction to them? The point is *sin kills*, and *we are not immortal*. Sin cannot be taken lightly.

We are going to turn to a very important scripture on this subject. The Apostle Paul is of course the writer of I Timothy 6, and I tell you, he knew a thing or two. Paul loved Timothy, and he loved the people that Timothy was pastoring, and in that sense he loved us too even though he did not know us personally. Now look at what he says to us:

**I Timothy 6:11-12** But you, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith.

Adam and Eve lost their faith. They did not fight the good fight of faith. But we are exhorted to fight the good fight of faith. In other words, we are to resist sin.

**I Timothy 6:12-15** Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold [grab onto, attach yourself] on eternal life, whereunto you are also called, and have professed a good profession before many witnesses. I give you charge in the sight of God, who quickens all things [that is, God who gives life to all things. Hang onto that thought. God gives life!], and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession: That you keep this commandment ["O man of God, flee unrighteousness"] without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall show who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords: who only has immortality. . .

*"Who only has immortality!"* Where does that leave you and me? We do not have it yet. Paul did not have it yet.

**I Timothy 6:16** who only has immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man has seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.

Those are powerful words! Adam and Eve did not have immortality at the time of their sin, and they died. Here was the converted Paul writing to people who had the Spirit of God, even as he had the Spirit of God (and God's Word is truth), and he said we do not have immortality yet. That is an issue that is decided in the future based upon whether we are pursuing life as God lives. That issue has not yet been determined. This is sobering, brethren. Do we get the point? Paul is admonishing us to fight sin strongly, reminding us that God is the giver of all life, including *resurrection* life, and we will not have it until He gives it.

The very first sin committed in the pages of the Bible was a false doctrine taught by Satan against God's truth, and involves the supposed immortality of the human soul, which is an out-and-out lie. Now why do I bring this up to us? Because this doctrine was subtly insinuated into the first century

church as part of a package of false doctrines through Gnosticism, and it *did* (as it did to Adam and Eve) undermine the faith of those people, motivating them to sin. It came very close to destroying the first century church.

A more complete history of that remains for another sermon, but the record is contained within the pages of the New Testament as to what the apostles were attempting to counter when they wrote. Now do you think we are going to escape being tested against this same lying false doctrine?

One of the factors that trips Christians up is not fearing sin and its consequences as we should. I was recently searching the web for information on the origin of the immortality of the soul doctrine, and came upon a paper written by a Swiss theologian on the subject, and I found something of interest in it. I want to share it with you. The man's name is Oscar Cullmann. He made the statement that *nothing* shows the difference between the truth of the Bible on the subject as is exemplified by Jesus' attitude toward death as contrasted to Socrates' attitude toward death as written by Plato in the "Phaedo," which is the title of Plato's work.

Plato was a disciple of Socrates, who apparently wrote after witnessing Socrates' death. Socrates believed very strongly in the immortality of the soul. Jesus did not. Instead, Jesus greatly feared sin and death. I am going to give you a fairly extensive quote from Mr. Cullmann's paper as he analyzed and condensed what Plato wrote. Cullmann, incidentally, does not believe that man has an immortal soul. He believes the Bible.

Remember what Cullmann is doing. He is analyzing and condensing what Plato wrote. He is giving a paraphrase here of what Plato wrote.

Quoting Cullmann's paraphrase of Plato's "Phaedo":

The soul confined within the body belongs to the eternal world. As long as we live, our soul finds itself in a prison, that is, in a body essentially alien to it. Death is, in fact, the great liberator. It looses the chains, since it leads the soul out of the prison of the body and back to its eternal home. Since body and soul are radically different from one another and belong to a different world, the destruction of the body cannot mean the destruction of the soul anymore than a

musical composition can be destroyed when the instrument is destroyed.

Although the proofs of the immortality of the soul do not have for Socrates himself the same value as the proofs of a mathematical theorem, they nonetheless attain within their own sphere the highest possible degree of validity, and make immortality so probable that it amounts to a 'fair chance' for man. When the great Socrates traced the arguments for immortality in his address to his disciple on the day of his death, he did not merely teach this doctrine: at that moment he lived his doctrine. He showed how we serve the freedom of the soul, even in this present life, when we occupy ourselves with the eternal truths of philosophy. For through philosophy we penetrate into the eternal world of ideas to which the soul belongs, and we free the soul from the prison of the body. Death does no more than complete this liberation. Plato shows us how Socrates goes to his death in complete peace and composure. The death of Socrates is a beautiful death. Nothing is seen here of death's terror. Socrates cannot fear death, since indeed it sets us free from the body. Whoever fears death proves that he loves the world of the body, that he is thoroughly entangled in the world of sense. Death is the soul's great friend. So he teaches, and so, in wonderful harmony with his teaching, he dies - the man who embodied the Greek world in its noblest form.

Before we go on to hear what the Bible shows Jesus' attitude was before His own death, let us look briefly at a couple of scriptures. We are going to turn to Hebrews 2:14-15.

**Hebrews 2:14-15** Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

The first thing we need to note here is that death is a tool of Satan—that it in no way represents God's will. I think that it is safe to assume that if it is a tool of Satan, and he epitomizes evil, there cannot be much good in it except

as to how *God* might use it in *spite* of Satan's devious ploys. Remember that one principle: Death is a tool of Satan.

**I Corinthians 15:24-26** Then comes the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father: when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

Death is a tool of Satan, and death is an enemy. It is not a friend, as Socrates in his misguided belief thought. The point is very clear, that despite Socrates' and Plato's intelligent minds, death is not a friend of mankind. The Bible portrays death as a hostile force that has continued since Adam and Eve's sin. It is a power *foreign* to God's purpose for humanity. It is a power that demonic forces use to exercise authority over us through sin, keeping us always in fear. Death absolutely does not express the will of the Holy God.

Do you think that Jesus (knowing better than any man ever did) would go before this enemy so powerful—the last enemy to be destroyed—in the frame of mind that Socrates did? Not on your life! His was a titanic battle against the most powerful weapon Satan has at his command. He is the lord of death.

Now let us hear how Jesus dies. Remember, that the pain preceding His death cannot be separated from one another. Both the pain and the death belong together. They are a complete package, because both the pain and the death itself were the result of the same thing—sin. If you think that death itself would be a blessed relief, you are only partly right, because what Jesus had to face before He died was the fact that this would be the first time that He ever absolutely had no contact with and sharing of life with the Father.

**Mark 14:32-35** And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he said to his disciples, Sit you here while I shall pray. And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy. And said unto them, My soul [My life] is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry you here, and watch. And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible the hour might pass from him.

In verse 33 it states that He became greatly troubled and deeply distressed. That does not sound at all like Socrates, who went to his death apparently smiling. In verse 34 He says, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death." A translator by the name of Weiss renders this, (and I think it is really good), "My affliction is so great that I am sinking under the weight of it." This brings to mind David's Psalm 69, which has Messianic overtones to it. I am going to quote a couple of verses out of that, because it says:

**Psalm 69:1** Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul [up to my neck].

You get the picture of somebody who is drowning, of somebody who is gasping, as it were, for breath.

**Psalm 69:2** I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing.

His thoughts are of someone standing in quicksand. It is almost as if his weight is sucking him down into death, and he is fighting against it, but he cannot lift himself out of it, and there is no swimming away from it.

**Psalm 69:2-3** I am come into deep waters where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: my eyes fail while I wait for my God.

He does not sound there like some happy camper.

Luke 12:50 shifts the time a little bit previous to the time that we see in Mark 14, but we are going to see here how this was already on Jesus' mind. He says:

**Luke 12:50** But I have a baptism to be baptized with [meaning His death]; and how am I straitened [meaning in great difficulty] till it be accomplished!

"How distressed I am until it be accomplished!" He was already thinking about it, and it distressed Him.

One of the things God is telling us is that Jesus is so thoroughly human that He shares the natural fear of death. Also in His view of things here is that Jesus knew He was going to be abandoned by God during the crucifixion—an abandonment that would be the work of death—God's enemy.

Jesus was not sleepwalking through this. He was afraid, but not as a coward of the men who would put Him to death. But death for Him is not divine as Socrates thought. It is dreadful because He does not want to be alone in this most terrible moment in all His life.

**Mark 14:36-41** And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto you; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what *you* will. And he comes, and finds them sleeping, and says unto Peter, Simon, sleep you? Could not you watch one hour? Watch you and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak. And again he went away, and prayed, and spake the same words. And when he returned he found them asleep again, (for their eyes were heavy,) neither knew they what to answer him. And he came the third time, and said unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough, the hour is come: behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Jesus was afraid, and so He calls out to the Father for understanding and affirmation that it is His will, and if it is His will, Jesus will submit regardless, even though He knows that to die is to be utterly forsaken, and He wants to be as close to God as He was throughout His entire life. That was not possible, and He knew it, and so He reached out to His human friends. Three times He did this in order not to be alone, even begging them to stay awake. He does not want to be forsaken.

Do you get the picture? Jesus is showing us that death is not a friend. It is the ultimate in separation from life and relationships.

**Hebrews 5:7** Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.

I am convinced that the scene that we just read of in Gethsemane is what is being referred to here, and if this is correct, Jesus wept and cried in the face of death. So here are the death scenes: Socrates, calmly, and composedly drinking the hemlock. Jesus cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" This is not showing death as a friend. This is death in all of its frightful horror, because Jesus understood what was at stake. This is reality—the last enemy to be destroyed, challenging the Savior at what appears to be His weakest moment.

Socrates' death was his fantasy, established on a lie that he believed. But truth is far different. In God's purpose, death is an accommodation to the outworking of His plan. Death is God's, Jesus', and mankind's enemy, because it separates us from God and the fullness of God's purpose for creating us; therefore, it must be overcome and destroyed.

Besides the radical difference between biblical truth and pagan Greek philosophy involved in the contrast between Jesus' and Socrates' death, it is very important to our understanding of overcoming. Not only that, but the actual accomplishment of overcoming and growth, and a proper appreciation of Jesus' death and resurrection.

First I want you to remind yourself that Passover is a memorial of Christ's atoning death.

**I Corinthians 11:26-29** For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you do show the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

I want you to look briefly at the concept of appreciating what Christ did. In an overall sense, appreciation and our gratitude is of prime importance to God. Lack of appreciation might be shown in any number of ways, but they are all encapsulated within the statement in verse 29, where it says, "not discerning the Lord's body."

It would take an entire sermon to cover a number of ways this lack of appreciation might be shown, but not discriminating Jesus' death from all other deaths is of prime importance to God that we have it, and express it to Him.

We will leave the appreciation factor, and look at the accomplishment of growth.

**Revelation 2:7** He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches: To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

**Revelation 2:11** He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches: He that overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death.

Seven times in these two chapters Jesus said that it is those who overcome who are going to receive the blessings of eternal life and the rewards that come along with it. "Growth," "overcome," or "victory" (whichever term one wants to use) does not occur unless the enemy we are so easily ensnared by—any enemy that limits the fullness of our potential—is met and defeated.

I want to give you an illustration from everyday life that might help our understanding. Suppose you read every book that you could find on how to play the piano, and you agreed with what they wrote, but you never sat down at the piano to learn how to play it. Would the skill at playing the piano be yours? Absolutely not. The only thing that we would be qualified to do in such a situation is *talk* about piano music. Hundreds of millions of people can do *that*!

How many hundreds of millions of people are there who can talk about the Bible because they might have read it, but they are not *practicing* what it says? And so they are equipped in one way, but they are not prepared for the Kingdom of God because they are not practicing what it says. This is why the overcomers are going to be given these things. If there is something that is subtly confusing us, making us fail because we do not have the proper motivation, maybe thinking that we already have eternal life, we are not going to overcome. That issue of eternal life has not been determined yet.

**Revelation 3:21** To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." He is the Lord of life. Satan is the lord of death. Jesus' resurrection, and our resurrection to God-life could only occur if He conquered death (Satan's most powerful tool of threat) by dying, without ever sinning. The victory over death could not be obtained simply by living on as an immortal soul, thus fundamentally not dying. Jesus had to meet and overcome death itself, and we cannot overcome by avoiding our enemy either. The trials of life are to be met in battle, and overcome our spiritual war, even as Jesus overcame. He too had to overcome.

**Revelation 1:18** I am he that lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

We have to pass muster before Him. Why? Because He conquered death. He met it on the field of battle and He conquered it by never sinning, even though death claimed His life.

**Revelation 2:8** And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna, write: These things says the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.

Whoever wants to conquer death must die. He must truly really seek to live. Jesus must conquer it by invading it on its own turf. Do you know what death's own turf is? It is absolute *nothingness*! He must give up life itself—the most precious good God has given to anybody.

Socrates is not alive. He is dead because he does not have an immortal soul, and neither did Jesus at that point in His life. If anybody ever deserved to live on without dying, it was Him, on the basis of His perfect life. But He did not have immortality either. No human being, including the Son of God, was inherently immortal, because brethren, if He was immortal, He lied; He did not really die. But He *did* die.

So the final challenge appeared. His own, and our, worst enemy appeared on the scene at the very end, and it too had to be conquered. Death is the worst enemy, because it is nothing. Nothingness. Death rifts the complete loss of everything God has created for us. In death—nothingness—there is no awareness, no love, no relationships at all, no hope, no joy, no creativity, no future, no sound, no tasting, no anticipation. Nothing.

Now do we really trust Him to bring us back to life? I will tell you something that is very good to learn, that those who do trust Him to overcome death, for them will be overcoming *now* while they are yet alive in order to impress God that they are already living by faith, and therefore trust Him. Living *then* is based upon how we are living now. Mankind was made to live God-level life, experience relationships, love and create; but death is nothingness.

**Luke 24:24-26** And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not. Then he [Jesus] said unto them [the two men on the road to Emmaus. Jesus was walking with them, and for some reason their minds were held from recognizing Him.], O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?

It had to be done, or there would be no immortality for us.

**John 12:23-24** And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, [truly, truly] I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone: but if it die, it brings forth much fruit.

Brethren, Jesus' death was the subject of the conversation of those two men on the road to Emmaus, and Jesus affirmed to them, and to you and me, that in order for God's plan to be concluded, He had to die. Now if the resurrection to immortality and God-life is to be worth anything, it must issue from nothingness—or *the nothingness*—of genuine death by means of One having the power to give life. Remember what we read in the very first

set of scriptures in I Timothy 6:13, that God quickens, or gives life to all, and He only has the power to give immortal life. Now Jesus has it too. It must not issue forth from an already living mortal. God-level life issuing from genuine death required a divine act of creation.

**Revelation 21:5** And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

"Behold, I make all things new." I just said that resurrection requires a divine act of creation, and this act of creation calls back to life not just part of one who died, but the whole person—that is, all that God had created before, and then annihilated in that person when he died. Brethren, Jesus Christ is the *first* of the firstfruits, and we are the remainders of the first fruits. Jesus' resurrection to God-life was the first act of God's promise to "create all things new," or to "make all things new," however you want to say it. The resurrection of the remainder of the firstfruits will be the next step in the fulfilling of that promise.

In Socrates' and in this world's belief in the immortality of the soul, no new act of creation is required, because to them real life—the immortal soul—lives on. It never died. They think that the body is bad and must be destroyed, and so to them the destruction of the body is not destruction of true life. But brethren, that is untrue, because physical life *is* true life given of God. It is merely shorter and weaker than the spirit life, but it is still life created by God and it is not to be denigrated in any way. The Bible makes no distinction.

The death of our God-given physical life is the destruction of God-given life, and that is why murder or suicide is so bad. It is the destruction of God's greatest gift—life. This begins to point out why sin is so bad, because sin committed, and continued with no change, with no overcoming, with no growth, guarantees the destruction of life. It cannot continue on that basis, and so it is death, and not the body, that must be conquered by the resurrection.

To anybody who comprehends even a small portion of the nothingness of death, a resurrection—any resurrection—is a mind-boggling revolutionary

event, a powerful positive miraculous act of creation, and for this to take place something else also had to occur—something fearful. Life formed by God had been destroyed. Jesus *is* the truth, and in Jesus' death we once again find truth. He gives a true picture of the glory of life, and a putrid odor of death. To God, death is not beautiful; not even the death of Jesus Christ.

Thirty percent of those "born-again" people calling themselves Christian, polled by George Barna, do not believe that Jesus was resurrected. They have carelessly disregarded the teaching that states that the hope of every true follower of Christ is the resurrection of the dead. I can only assume that they must believe in the immortality of the soul, and that life after death of the body leads somewhere else besides the Kingdom of God. In disregarding that doctrine, they are sinning greatly, doing themselves enormous harm. God states it very clearly in Ezekiel 18:4.

**Ezekiel 18:4** Behold, all souls are mine.

Do we believe this, brethren? Insert the word "persons" there in place of souls. "All people are mine."

**Ezekiel 18:4** Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine; the soul that sins, it shall die.

Does God mean what He says? He does not say the soul that sins will just take life onto another form.

**Ezekiel 18:20** The soul that sins, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.

Individual responsibility is the term that we have with God. Romans 6:23 confirms and amplifies this when Paul stated that "the wages of sin is death." Nothingness. Not eternal life in some other place.

What is so hard to understand about this? Nothing. People simply refuse to believe it, preferring a fable instead of truth, because truth makes people

uncomfortable. It puts pressure on us to do things that we would rather not do, and stop doing things we would rather keep doing.

**Ezekiel 33:10-11** Therefore O you son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus you speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, As *I* live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn you, turn you from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?

Every year God gives us an exercise in evaluating ourselves in turning from our disbelief, evil, careless, and haphazard doings. He tells us in II Peter 3:9 that He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Right here in Ezekiel 33 He says, "Turn you, turn you . . . for why will you die?" "Why will you choose nothingness rather than having the opportunity to experience life on My level?" God is saying.

So every year God gives us this opportunity to evaluate ourselves in order that we might have an opportunity to come to repentance, and turn. He reminds us at this time, in the book of Hebrews, where He says:

**Hebrews 2:6-9** But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that you are mindful of him? Or the son of man, that you visit him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honour, and did set him over the works of your hands: You have put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. [Not yet. That lies beyond the grave.] But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels [Why?] for the suffering of death.

He really was DEAD! He was not in the tomb aware of what was going on. He was in a state of *nothingness*. Even though by all counts He had every right to live without having to die, He chose that way, that He, by the grace of God, should taste death for *every* man. Only He was qualified to do that, and He did it. He conquered death.

Let us use the remaining time before Passover to examine and repent, thus more fully understanding and appreciating the life God has given us now, the works of Jesus Christ in our behalf, and even greater, stronger, and more glorious life that will come through the resurrection. To reject Christ's resurrection, as those 30% of Christians apparently do, is to reject also His death—not His death as a fact of religious history, but rather its alternate purpose. Its alternate purpose is to be the means for the forgiveness of our sins that we might have access to the very throne of God, and have God's creative power work in us to prepare us for the Kingdom of God by means of our resurrection in His spiritual likeness.

The apostle Paul leaves us with this note. He says:

**I Corinthians 15:54-58** 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 your sting? O grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin: and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be you steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has rendered death powerless for those who truly believe, and steadfastly practice the way of life that Jesus pioneered. These peoples' trust will be magnificently rewarded.