

Two Ways to Live

Hebrews 9:15-28

¹⁵ Therefore he is ^vthe mediator of a new covenant, so that ^wthose who are called may ^xreceive the promised eternal inheritance, ^ysince a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. ⁸ ¹⁶ For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. ¹⁷ For ^za will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. ¹⁸ Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated ^awithout blood. ¹⁹ For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took ^bthe blood of calves and goats, ^cwith water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, ²⁰ saying, ^d“This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.” ²¹ And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both ^ethe tent and all the vessels used in worship. ²² Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and ^fwithout the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. ²³ Thus it was necessary for ^gthe copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴ For Christ has entered, not into holy places ^hmade with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God ⁱon our behalf. ²⁵ Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as ^jthe high priest enters ^kthe holy places every year with blood not his own, ²⁶ for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, ¹he has appeared ^monce for all ⁿat the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ And just as ^oit is appointed for man to die once, and ^pafter that comes judgment, ²⁸ so Christ, having been offered once ^qto bear the sins of ^rmany, will appear ^sa second time, ^tnot to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly ^uwaiting for him.



Gordon and Norma Yeager were married for 72 years and they loved to spend time together. Gordon reportedly said, “I have to stick around. I can’t go until she does because I have to stay here for her and she would say the same thing.”¹ One week ago Wednesday, Gordon pulled in front of an oncoming car. Both he and his wife were rushed to the hospital and held each other’s hands in the Intensive Care Unit. At 3:38 in the afternoon, Gordon died still holding his wife’s hand. Exactly one hour later—to the very minute—Norma also died. At their funeral, they held hands in their

casket. Gordon was 94 and Norma was 90. Both seemed to have lived a long and happy life together.

Will good living extend my life? If I eat organic food, get lots of exercise, don’t smoke, wear my seat belt, wear my motorcycle helmet and take my vitamins, will I live longer? Am I, in any sense, in control of the timing of my own death? I realize that health studies don’t always agree with one another. I remember thirty years ago a study came out stating that the consumption of chocolate donuts was bad for your health. I was delighted to read that scientists had changed their mind on this topic. Oh, you didn’t see that study? ☺ Some studies do disagree about the long-term health benefits of certain foods, but it is undeniable that if you practice all of the things I mentioned—everything else being equal—this will extend your life.

But how does this match up with what Scripture says about God ordaining the days of our life? Here is a portion of Psalm 139.

¹³ *For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.*

¹⁴ *I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.*

¹⁵ *My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place.*

When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,

¹⁶ *your eyes saw my unformed body.*

*All the days ordained for me
were written in your book
before one of them came to be.*

If God has ordained the exact number of days for me to live, then how can I extend those days through healthy habits? The short answer is that our choices and God’s will work in tandem. If my diet is pitiful and I never exercise, the chances of me dying sooner are extremely high. If I refuse to wear my seatbelt or a helmet on a motorcycle, the chances of an early death rise dramatically. But this does not mean that God ceases to ordain the day of our death. In some mysterious way that we cannot comprehend, our daily choices and God’s sovereign will work in tandem with one another. The result is that my choices matter and God’s will cannot be thwarted. This is important to understand because some people think that they don’t need to make good lifestyle choices because the day of their death has been fixed in stone and nothing they do can

change this. It is horribly wrong for Christians to accept this kind of fatalism. Furthermore, it is presumptuous to think that if I don't wear a seatbelt this won't change the time of my death. It very well could change it. I have heard Christians use God's sovereignty as an excuse for their own laziness.

We all have an appointment with death. This is stated clearly in verse 27. *And just as it is appointed for man to die once.* It has been said that the only thing you can avoid in this life is death and taxes. If you are willing to go to prison for tax evasion, you can avoid taxes, but you cannot avoid death. It is appointed for man once to die.

This verse is also useful for rejecting ideas such as reincarnation. When my office was at the



Landmark, I often parked behind a car with this bumper sticker. This is obviously meant to make a mockery of the miracle of the new birth of salvation. Have you ever noticed that people who believe in reincarnation always talk about their

past lives in the most glowing of terms? Shirley MacLaine is probably the most famous promoter of reincarnation. She claims to remember many of her past lives. Here is one such description.

I vividly remember being androgynous in the Lemurian (pre-Atlantis) time period. My state of being and that of others around me was peaceful and serene. Procreation occurred through the power of the mind in deep meditation.

MacLaine also recalls being a gypsy and an entertainer in an ancient culture. Why do they always remember the good parts of their past lives but never the bad parts? I have never heard anyone say, "I remember one of my past lives as a butterfly. I had the most beautiful wings with vivid blues and yellows which were translucent in the summer sun. I was flittering about one day with my butterfly soulmate flying over a field of wildflowers near the shore of the Mediterranean Sea when all of a sudden a swallow came tearing through the sky and carried me off to my demise. The last thing the swallow ate was my tiny, little brain and in my final memory I was thinking to myself, "Man, I sure hope I come back as a bird!" No believer in reincarnation ever tells these kinds of stories. No one seems to recall their life as a single celled organism swimming in the primordial ooze.

It is appointed for man to die once. That part is difficult enough but what comes next is infinitely worse. *It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.* There are no "do overs" in life. You can't take a mulligan—you can't tee up and try the shot again. You die and then you are judged. But unfortunately, some Christians take an agnostic stance even with this much clarity. I have heard Christians say things like this. "I don't think my uncle was saved when he died, but you never know what happens between the moment of death and meeting God." Have you heard people say this before? I have heard evangelical pastors say such things. What they are saying is that if the person did not place their faith in Christ while they were living, maybe they will when he or she meets Jesus in person.

I can understand the motive behind such a statement. The person who says it is attempting to offer a little hope for person who has died but in so doing, you also have to deny the clear truth

of this Scripture. Such a statement might also be made in order to express the mercy of God in regard to salvation. In other words, God is so merciful that he might just give the unbeliever one final chance after he dies. God is merciful. God is infinitely merciful but we must not alter the truthfulness of this Scripture in an attempt to make him sound more merciful.

God is so infinitely merciful that even his judgments demonstrate his mercy. We have several examples of this from Revelation.

¹² *I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red,¹³ and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind.¹⁴ The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.*

¹⁵ *Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains.¹⁶ They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!¹⁷ For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”* (Revelation 6:12-17)

As these judgments were occurring everyone on the earth will be given a final chance to repent and turn to Christ but still many will refuse to do so.

²⁰ *The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk.²¹ Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.* (Revelation 9:20-21)

⁸ *The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire.⁹ They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.*

¹⁰ *The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony¹¹ and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.* (Revelation 16:8-11)

Not only will people not repent, but this passage tells us that they will die while cursing the name of God. This is the proper way to view all natural disasters and all sickness and suffering—they are all opportunities, and in some cases final opportunities—to repent and turn to the Lord.

It is appointed to men once to die and after that comes judgment. But this is not the way a believer dies. For this we have to finish the rest of the chapter.

²⁷ *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,²⁸ so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.* The author makes a direct correlation between the once and for all death of the unbeliever with the once and for all death of Christ, but that is where the comparison ends. The once for all death of Christ “takes away the sins of many people.” We saw last week how the death of Jesus is a substitutionary death. He was our

substitute on the cross. He was our substitute in propitiation—satisfying the just wrath of the Father.

What took place under the old covenant was a copy and shadow of the heavenly realities. This is why it was absolutely important for Moses to have built the Tabernacle to precise specifications. These earthly copies, even though they were temporary and not ultimately effective, teach us more deeply about the sacrifice of Christ. As verse 24 says, *For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.* Jesus was our priest in the tabernacle of Heaven. After all, what does the word tabernacle mean? It means a dwelling place. In the gospel of John we are told that *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1:14). The word for dwelling here means tabernacle. We could say that the Word became flesh and made his tabernacle among us.

Psalm 27 gives a promise of security.

⁵ *For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock.*

⁶ *Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD.*

The Lord hides his people in his tabernacle. In other words, we are hidden in himself. Jesus is our tabernacle. He is our hiding place. But why did Jesus appear in the heavenly tabernacle of God on our behalf? He appeared there as our high priest. He appeared there to offer himself as spotless sacrifice. He appeared there to absorb the wrath of his Father. He appeared there *so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.* Jesus entered the tabernacle of Heaven with our sin so that we could enter without sin.

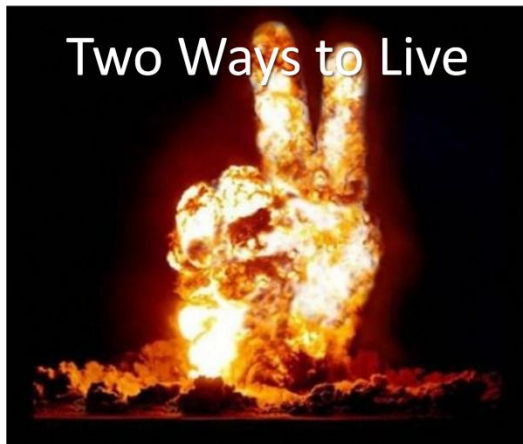
This text present two ways to die. One group of people dies once and after that faces the judgment. The other group dies once and after that enters into the tabernacle of Jesus. And if there are two ways to die then it means there are two ways to live. One group eagerly awaits the second coming of Christ who will bring salvation because we are waiting for him. But some might wonder why we are waiting for salvation if we have already been saved. Throughout Scripture there is a constant tension between what is often called “the already but not yet.” We have already been saved but we have not yet entered into that full salvation. We still live in this fallen world living out our daily lives in these broken bodies, struggling against sin, disease and decay. I don’t think anyone would say that we have yet received our full salvation.

There are two ways to live. The believers live in eager expectation the return of Christ and this passage from 1 Thessalonians tells us how to wait.

⁸ *But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.* ⁹ *For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.* ¹⁰ *He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.* ¹¹ *Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing* (1 Thes. 5:8-11).

We wait for his return to us or else our going to him. This is our great hope and our brightest joy. Since we know how we are going to die we know how we should live. As the last verse from Thessalonians says, *Therefore encourage one another and build each other up*. Are you doing that for one another? I know that we can be encouraging to one another, but it is a habit? A lifestyle? I dare you to encourage a brother or sister in Christ this week.

I just read an article this morning about how Herman Cain used encouragement. He took over the management of 450 Burger Kings in the worst performing region of the U.S. Within three years he turned it into the best performing region in the country and he accomplished this goal primarily through what he calls “spontaneous unexpected praise.”² I think that if Herman Cain can do that for a bunch of burger flippers, that we can do even more for one another within the body of Christ.



The other way to live is to live for yourself by rejecting the Lord in unbelief. The wrath of God is resting upon you (John 3:36). You are facing death and a bitter judgment but worst of all, you are facing an eternity without the joy of the Lord Jesus.

It is certainly acceptable to warn unbelievers of the coming judgment. Jesus did it often and the author of Hebrews does it in this text, even though he is not speaking directly to unbelievers. Our evangelism must also include holding forth the glory and majesty of Christ. We must understand that judgment is

terrible because it separates one from Jesus. What makes Hell so pitiful and horrid is that Jesus is not there.

I love how C.S. Lewis talks about unbelievers in his book, *The Weight of Glory*.

It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbor.

The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbor's glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken.

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare.

All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations.

It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics.

There are no *ordinary* people.
You have never talked to a mere mortal.

Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat.

But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.

This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn.
We must play.

But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously—no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption.

And our charity must be real and costly love, with deep feeling for the sins in spite of which we love the sinner—no mere tolerance or indulgence which parodies love as flippancy parodies merriment.³

There are two ways to die and there are two ways to live and Jesus is at the center of both. In the one he will be your tabernacle and holy, guiding presence and in the other he will be absent for all eternity. Which life path are you walking—one toward “everlasting splendor” or “immortal horrors”? If it is the latter, you can choose this day to turn from your sin and place your faith in Christ alone. His blood will cleanse your conscience. If you are eagerly awaiting for the return of Christ, how then shall you live? What difference will that make tomorrow and this week and this month?

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^v ch. 8:6; 12:24

^w [ch. 3:1]; See Rom. 8:28

^x [ch. 10:36; Ex. 32:13]

^y Rom. 3:24, 25; 5:6

⁸ The Greek word means both *covenant* and *will*; also verses 16, 17

^z [Gal. 3:15]

^a Ex. 24:6, 8

^b ver. 12

^c [Lev. 14:4, 7; Num. 19:6, 17]

^d Cited from Ex. 24:8; [Matt. 26:28]

^e [Ex. 29:12, 36; Lev. 8:15, 19; 16:14, 16; 2 Chr. 29:22]

^f Lev. 17:11

^g ch. 8:5

^h ch. 8:2; [ver. 11]

ⁱ ch. 7:25; See Rom. 8:34

^j See ver. 7

^k ch. 10:19

^l 1 John 3:5

^m ver. 12; ch. 7:27; 10:10; 1 Pet. 3:18

ⁿ [ch. 1:2; 1 Cor. 10:11]

^o See Gen. 3:19

^p See Matt. 16:27

^q Isa. 53:12; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18

^r Matt. 20:28; 26:28; Mark 10:45; Rev. 5:9

^s Acts 1:11

^t See ch. 4:15

^u Titus 2:13; [Isa. 25:9]

¹ <http://www.kcci.com/news/29528191/detail.html#ixzz1bGHqqCQs>

² <http://www.worldmag.com/articles/18728>

³ C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (HarperOne, 2001), pp. 45-46.