

CHAPTER 32

OF THE STATE OF MAN AFTER DEATH, AND OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

The intermediate state

“1. The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption; but their souls (which neither die nor sleep), having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies: and the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day. Besides these two places for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none.”

The bodies of all who die decompose and return to dust (Gen 3:19). One of the marks of the Messiah was that he would not experience this corruption of the body (Ps 16:10-11; cf. Peter preaching in Acts 2:22-32, and Paul preaching in Acts 13:34-37).

The souls of believers at death go to be with the Lord (Luke 16:22, 25; 23:43; Phil 1:23), in conscious knowledge (2 Cor 5:1-5, 8; Rev 6:9-11).

The souls of unbelievers at death suffer torment (Luke 16:23-24; Jude 6-7).

The Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory is found nowhere in Scripture, and contradicts the passages quoted above. This false doctrine has been used by that church to keep its followers in doubt about the fate of their loved ones, and has led to many abuses, such as the sale of indulgences.

Resurrection of the just

“2. At the return of the Lord Jesus Christ such living persons as are found in him shall not die but be changed, and all the dead in Christ shall be raised up with the self-same bodies, and none other, although with different qualities, which shall be united again to their souls forever.”

Our Confession, even in its Bible Presbyterian form, does not go into great detail about the order of the last-time events. This is good, as it allows appropriate liberty in the difficult area of Biblical prophecy.

At Christ's return there are two groups of Christians who will be glorified: those who have died, and those who still are living. Those who are still living will be changed (commonly called the rapture), and those who have died will be raised up with perfect resurrection bodies (Job 19:25-27; 1 Cor 15:22-26; 1 Thess 4:13-17). These bodies will be like the resurrected body of Jesus (cf. Luke 24:39, 42-43; John 20:27). Both of these groups will meet the Lord in the air and then be with him forever.

This resurrection of the just is referred to as "the resurrection of life" (John 5:29), and "the first resurrection" (Rev 20:5-6).

Resurrection of the unjust

"3. The bodies of the unjust shall, after Christ has reigned on earth a thousand years, be raised by the power of God to dishonor."

The Bible consistently teaches that all will be raised from the dead, both the saved and the lost (Isa 26:19; Dan 12:1-2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Rev 20:4-6, 11-14).

The lost, at their resurrection, will be raised to dishonor and judgment. This resurrection is referred to as "the resurrection of damnation (judgment)" (John 5:29), and "the second death" (Rev 20:6, 14).

The Bible Presbyterian version of the Confession has changed this section to indicate that this resurrection of the lost will take place after the time that Jesus reigns on the earth for a thousand years (Rev 20:1-6, 12-15). This agrees with the order of events which Paul lays out in 1 Cor 15:20-28:

- Christ raised (v. 23a)
- Believers raised at his coming (v. 23b)
- Enemies put down (vv. 24b-25)
- "The end"; death destroyed; kingdom delivered to the Father (vv. 24a, 26)