

f e a r s w e f a c e

# The Fear of Death

Neil Simon, who wrote *The Odd Couple* and *Barefoot in the Park*, was asked on the Dick Cavett Show whether making a lot of money concerned him. The studio went dead silent when Simon answered, "No . . . what does concern me is the fear of dying."

Woody Allen said, "It's not that I'm afraid to die, I just don't want to be there when it happens." I think he is afraid; and most people are if they give any serious thought to death. It's so permanent, so full of unknowns of what happens next, so completely changing of everything in the way that it rips a person from life and the world.

But for the believer in Jesus, death is none of these things—it has been forever changed. It is not permanent, not unknown because the One who came back from death told us what is coming, and the changes it brings will be experienced as deliverance.

Donald Grey Barnhouse shared this experience: I was driving with my children to my wife's funeral where I was to preach the sermon. As we came into one small town there strode down in front of us a truck that came to stop before a red light. It was the biggest truck I ever saw in my life, and the sun was shining on it at just the right angle that took its shadow and spread it across the snow on the field beside it. As the shadow covered that field, I said, "Look children at that truck, and look at its shadow. If you had to be run over, which would you rather be run over by? Would you rather be run over by the truck or by the shadow?" My youngest child said, "The shadow couldn't hurt anybody." "That's right," I continued, "and death is a truck, but the shadow is all that ever touches the Christian. The truck ran over the Lord Jesus. Only the shadow is gone over mother."

## For Discussion

What explanations do people give for what happens after death?  
What are the reasons/motivations behind these explanations?

# Encounter

Read God's Word so that He can speak to you.

## Hebrews 2:9-18

*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*

*In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me."*

*Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil--and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

## Explore

### God's Word by asking questions of what you saw.

The notes which follow may help you to think through these questions

1)

Why do people fear death?

- What are some of the ways people try to avoid death or the fear of death?
- How successful are those ways?

2)

Do most people have good reasons to fear death? Why? What happens to people who don't have a relationship of salvation with Jesus?

- Is this true for *everyone* without Jesus?
- Is there existence after death for an unbeliever? What is it?

# Explore (cont.)

3)

What happens to a believer in Jesus when they die? (see 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 4:16—5:10)

- Why does 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 call death “sleep”?
- Why should a believer in Jesus be free from the fear of death?

4)

Why does the death of Jesus change death for someone who belongs to Him?

5)

Being released from the fear of death certainly changes how you face death. But how does it also change the way you live life? How does it affect . . .

- The kind of work you do or the way you do your work?
- Your relationships with family, friends, others?
- How you spend your money and time?
- The thoughts you have as you think about your past and future?
- The things that are “off-limits” and the things you enjoy—and the reasons for both?

6)

Nearly all of us have lost a loved one—or many loved ones. How do you feel about their deaths? What do you think about? Do you have regrets? Hope? Are you sad or OK? If you feel sad or bad about their death, what do you do?

7)

Are you afraid of dying? Why or why not?

# Notes on the Passage

(Adapted from Dr. Thomas Constable Bible Study Notes)

**8b-9** - Even though believers "do not yet see" Jesus glorified on earth, we *do* see Him—with the eye of faith—glorified *in heaven*. God has "crowned" Jesus "with glory and honor" because He endured death. He "suffered death" because it was God's will for Him to "taste death for every person (everyone)." "Suffering," introduced here, becomes a dominant theme in this epistle. This was God's purpose in the Incarnation. Jesus Christ's "death" was "for everyone" in that: by dying, He *paid the penalty* for the sins of *every* human being—elect and non-elect (cf. 1 John 2:2; 2 Peter 2:1; John 3:16). His death was *sufficient* for all, but it is *efficient* only for those who rest their confidence in it as what satisfied God.

**10** - The Son of Man is not the only One God intends to glorify (v. 6). All of His sons, believers, will experience glorification. "Him" is God the Father. "Author" is Jesus Christ, the Son of Man. The unusual title "author" (Gr. *archegos*) describes Jesus as a file leader, pioneer, pathfinder, and captain of a company of followers (cf. 12:2; Acts 3:15; 5:31) However, it also views Him as [originator or personal source](#). God *perfected* Jesus by charting His path to glory through "sufferings," and He does the same for Jesus' followers. We must go through suffering before we get to glory. By having experienced suffering, Jesus can more perfectly help us as we suffer (v. 18). He was "perfected" in this sense.

**11** - There is great solidarity between Jesus Christ and believers. The Old Testament taught this solidarity in Psalm 22:22 (v. 12), Isaiah 8:17 (v. 13a), and Isaiah 8:18 (v. 13b). Jesus will "not" feel "ashamed" (embarrassed or disappointed) to call sanctified believers His "brethren" when He leads them to glory (vv. 5, 10). "Not ashamed" is a *litotes* meaning that God is, quite to the contrary, *willing* and *happy* "to call them brethren" (cf. 11:16).

**12-13** - These quotations illustrate that Jesus will not blush to identify with the people of God. The emphasis in the first quotation is on the character ("name"; reputation) that Jesus Christ and believers share. His death has made us *holy* (set us apart; cf. 10:10, 14). Consequently we can have intimate fellowship with Jesus who dwells among us (by His Spirit; cf. Exod 25:8; 29:46).

The point of the second quotation is that Jesus, as well as His followers, *trusted* God. This is the basis for intimate fellowship. Daily trust in God characterized Jesus, and it characterizes Christians who continue to follow God faithfully. Such daily "trust" results in intimate fellowship with God. The point of the third quotation is that believers are Jesus Christ's spiritual "children." As such, He will provide for us and prepare us for the future—as a loving parent who has had greater experience traveling the same path (cf. John 14:1-3).

**14** - We children "share in flesh and blood" with one another; we share the limitations of humanity. To free us from these limitations, the Son had to assume the same limitations, which He did at the Incarnation. Jesus Christ broke Satan's "power" over believers by His "death." Obviously Satan still exercises great "power," but Jesus Christ broke his power (rendered him "powerless") to enslave believers (cf. Rom. 6:1-14). Furthermore Jesus Christ defeated Satan in the area of his greatest strength: his "power [to inflict] death."

# Notes on the Passage (cont.)

**15** - The "fear of death" enslaves unbelievers, in that this fear leads them to behave in ways that please Satan (e.g., selfishly, living for the present, etc.). A believer need not have the same fear of death as an unbeliever (cf. Luke 11:21-22). Consequently we need not feel compelled to live for the present (e.g., put self first, do anything to save our lives, etc.) as unbelievers do. The *fear of death* tyrannizes many people, both consciously and subconsciously.

**16** - The original readers, saved Jews, were both the physical and spiritual descendants of Abraham. Jesus Christ "does not give help to angels" in the same way He gives help to Christians. He helps us *uniquely* as an elder brother, as a parent (vv. 11-15), and as a fellow human being.

**17** - "All things" means in every way, specifically by experiencing human life and by suffering. Jesus Christ's identification with us made possible His ministry as "high priest," in which He would be "merciful" to us and "faithful" to God. The basis for this ministry was Jesus making satisfaction ("propitiation," by atonement) for sin by His own sacrifice.

**18** - As our priest, Jesus Christ can help us, because He has undergone the same trials we experience (in body, mind, and emotions), and has emerged victorious. The testing in view is the temptation to depart from God's will, specifically apostasy (cf. 5:8; Matt. 4:8-11; 16:22-23; 26:39; Luke 22:44). The picture is of an older brother helping his younger brothers navigate the pitfalls of growing up successfully. That is the role that a priest plays.

## Going Further

One thing we can do to train ourselves to remember, is to memorize a part of what our Father has said to us. The Holy Spirit can use this to change our thinking so that our "heads" are more like Jesus.

**This week, memorize Hebrews 2:9.**