

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Death and life after death have always been emotive and controversial topics. They can raise fears and anxieties that most of us would probably rather avoid, even though we know that some day we will have to face up to them one way or another. They are highly controversial because we all tend to form our own ideas about them, usually based on something we've heard or read at some time.

Some people are of the opinion that once we die, that's it, the end, there is nothing else; we are gone for ever. Others believe we continually return to the world in another form, and many hold the opinion that everyone will finally go to heaven.

So, what is the truth? Where do we go from here? Can the facts be established, and where should we look to find them? Here we open the door to controversy still wider as so many varied opinions exist.

WHERE TO BEGIN

The source of information I will endeavour to use in this account is the only one I believe could possibly contain the accurate information vital to our understanding of this fascinating and much misunderstood subject. You may have already guessed that I'm referring to the Bible, and you are absolutely right.

If anyone knows all about life, death, and life after death, then it must surely be God Himself. After all, He is the creator of all life, and the Bible is His account of:

- His creation of the world, the universe, mankind and all living creatures and plant life in perfect harmony with Himself.
- Man's rebellion against God, which brought sin into the world and broke down the relationship God had with him.
- His plan to restore man's relationship with Himself.
- His plan for the end of the world as we know it and for eternity.

Of course, we are all free to trust in some other source of information, but we'll need to be confident of its accuracy and authenticity as our response to it and our eternity will be dependent upon it.

God considers the Bible to be so important that He has even planned for it to outlive the world and the universe as we know them today, ***Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away. Luke 21 v 33.***

From this Bible verse we can also see that the world and the universe are not going to exist forever. A time is coming when God is going to remove them all in preparation for His plan for eternity, ... ***The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. 2 Peter 3 v 10.***

AT THE END

At that time God will judge every detail of the life of every person who has ever lived. This includes everyone who has already died as well as all who are still alive at the time. Those who have already died will be brought back to life, and every single person will be called to face God at His Judgement Seat which is called The Great White Throne. ... ***For we will all stand before God's judgement seat. It is written "As surely as I live", says the Lord, "Every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God". So then each one of use will given an account of himself to God. Romans 14 v 10-12.***

Then Jesus Himself will pass judgment on every individual person. God has appointed him to fulfil this role, ***For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the Man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him from the dead. Acts 17 v 31.*** Then Jesus will direct each person to the place he or she is to spend eternity. ***Then the King will say to those on His right, "Come you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world". Matthew 25 v 34. Then He will say to those on His left, "Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels". Matthew 25 v 41. Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life. Matthew 25 v 46.***

TWO DESTINATIONS

From these Bible verses we can see that there are two different final destinations, one is called, 'the kingdom' and the other, 'the eternal fire'. What will 'the eternal fire' be like? Let's take a brief look. The Bible says in ***Revelation 14 v 11 ... and the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever, there is no rest day or night*** and ***Revelation 20 v 10 says, ...They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*** From these two Bible passages alone it is clear that everyone who goes to 'the eternal fire' will be tormented continually day and night, and this will continue literally for ever with no hope of release or of death to end it all.

And what will 'the kingdom' be like? Again let's take a brief look. The Bible explains for us in **Revelation 21 v 3-4**, ***And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling place of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away"***.

So what will determine whether we will be directed to spend eternity in 'the kingdom' or to 'the eternal fire'? What measure will God use? Some light is thrown on this in the following Bible verses, ***Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Matthew 7 v 21***, and ***He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of His power. 2 Thessalonians 1 v 8-9***.

There are other Bible verses that also help us to understand about these two places, but by just looking at these two we can identify the basic measure that Jesus will use to determine whether he directs us to 'the kingdom' or 'the eternal fire'. 'The kingdom' will be reserved for those who know God and do His will, whilst 'the eternal fire' will be for everyone who does not know God and does not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus. Basically it's as simple and straightforward as that – it's all dependent on whether or not we know God and have a personal relationship with Him, and whether or not we do His will by obeying what the Bible says.

CAN WE KNOW GOD?

Knowing God doesn't just mean knowing about Him, it really does mean knowing Him personally. God intended right from the beginning that we should all have a personal relationship with Him - us talking to Him and Him talking to us. This isn't as strange as it may seem at first because this is what we know as 'praying'.

The Bible is God's instruction manual for our lives. It contains everything we need to know, and gives us direction and guidance for every aspect of our lives, for the present and the future. Everything it says is for our benefit and all He asks is that we live by what it says.

AT THE BEGINNING

Right from the very beginning, Adam and Eve both rebelled against God. Rather than live in perfect harmony with Him and obedience to Him, they chose to go their own way and live independently from Him. God calls this rebellion sin, and it was this sin that broke down their relationship with Him.

From that time onwards every person who has been born has inherited the same sinful nature and resulting broken relationship with God. ***For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3 v 23.*** This has caused us all to make our own way in life, independent from God, and it is why the world is in the sorry state we see as we look around us today.

If we continue to live this way independently from God right up to the end of our lives then Jesus will have no option but to direct us to 'the eternal fire' for ever. So, what can we do about it? If we are born with our sinful nature and our broken relationship with God then it must mean that we will all end up in eternal torment in 'the eternal fire', unless of course God has provided a way for us to escape from these dreadful consequences. Thankfully He has.

THE GOOD NEWS

Because God is neither unjust nor unloving He has provided one way for us to escape the consequences of our sin. If we follow His plan we will have our sin forgiven and our sinful nature changed. Instead of living independently from God we will have our relationship with Him restored and our eternity will be everlasting happiness in 'the kingdom of God' and not everlasting torment in 'the eternal fire'.

GOD'S RESCUE PLAN

God's son, Jesus Christ, was, and still is, that rescue plan. What do I mean by that? Well, in God's order of things, sin can only be cancelled out by means of a sacrifice, and that sacrifice must include the 'shedding of blood'. Sounds a bit gory doesn't it? The Bible says, ... ***without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Hebrews 9 v 22.*** In the early days sacrifices were made to God using animals such as bulls or goats or lambs. The animals' blood was shed and this covered over the sin of the person making the sacrifice for a year. Because of this it had to be repeated year after year.

However, 2,000 years ago God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to this earth. You will already know something about this I expect; that He was born at what we know as Christmas time, and that He was crucified and rose back to life again at what we know as Easter. At Easter He willingly sacrificed His own life when He was crucified, and His blood was shed, as it had been previously with the animals, and this was done by Him for the purpose of cancelling out the sin of the whole world. However, this was a final, once-and-for-all-time sacrifice which did not need to be repeated year after year. The Bible says, ... ***but now He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrificing of Himself. Hebrews 9 v 26***, and it also calls Him, ... ***the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. John 1 v 29***.

Jesus sacrificed Himself for the purpose of cancelling out the sin of the whole world, and that includes you and me. However, we cannot just take for granted that our own sin has been cancelled out. There is a personal response that God asks each one of us to make first. By making our own personal response to God our own sin is then cancelled out, our relationship with Him begins, and the 'kingdom of God' becomes our eternal home.

WE MUST RESPOND

Only the sincere heartfelt response that God asks for will release us from being condemned to eternal torment in 'the eternal fire' at the judgment. It is only by putting an end to living our own way independently from God, putting our lives into His hands and believing by faith what Jesus has done for us, that our sin can be cancelled out.

Our response to God must be made in this life. God does not hold us responsible for being born with a sinful nature, but if we ignore or reject what He has done to deliver us from that sinful nature and its consequences, we will remain in danger of eternal torment until we come to Him in repentance and respond in faith.

THE RESPONSE GOD ASKS US TO MAKE

STEP ONE: I must acknowledge that I am a sinner and have lived my life my own way independent from God. This is called sin and the Bible says, ***For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". Romans 3 v 23***.

STEP TWO: I must turn away from all that is wrong in my life, and from living my own way independently from God. The Bible calls this

repentance, and it says, ***Repent then and turn to God that your sins may be wiped out. Acts 3 v 19.***

STEP THREE: I must believe that Jesus is the Son of God and trust by faith what the Bible says He did for me. ... ***That Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures, that He was buried and that He was raised on the third day, according to the scriptures. 1 Corinthians 15 v 3-4.***

STEP FOUR: I must receive Jesus as my personal Lord and Saviour. In doing this I will become a child of God. ***Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God. John 1 v 12.***

To guide you as you make your own response to God here is a short prayer which you might find helpful. Find a quiet place somewhere and simply speak it out sincerely to God from your heart.

MY PERSONAL PRAYER

Dear God, I know I am a sinner and up till now I have gone my own way and lived my life independently of you. I am now willing to repent and turn away from all that is wrong in my life and from living independently of You and ask You to forgive me. I believe Jesus is Your Son and that He sacrificed His life on the cross for my sin, and was buried and rose back to life again after 3 days. I now ask Jesus to be my own personal Lord and Saviour, and I commit myself into Your hands, and ask You to guide me and help me live my life Your way. Amen.

A NEW LIFE

Having now made this response to God in faith and sincerity you can be sure that your sin has been forgiven and your relationship with God has begun. You will begin to enjoy a new life here and now with God Himself and His Son, Jesus, at the centre of everything for the rest of your life here on this earth and for eternity. You will also receive a quiet and gentle inner strength from God's Holy Spirit to help you live as God wants you to.

You will go on to find that you enjoy meeting with other Christians to worship God and get to know Him. You will begin to find out about praying (talking and listening to God), reading the Bible, and living by what it says. After a while you will discover that your tastes, lifestyle and outlook begin to change as you follow God's true purpose for your life. The Bible says in

2 Corinthians 2 v 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation: the old has gone, the new has come.

Responding in this way to God will be the turning point in your life – turning from being your own master in all things, from trusting in your own capabilities and ingenuity, and from relying on fragile and uncertain worldly resources. You will begin to trust God and allow Him to lead and guide you more and more. His plan for your life will begin to unfold. The Bible says, ***Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3 v 5-6.***

You will begin to understand and experience the love of God and find real peace which comes from the assurance that your life and your future are now safe in His hands. Jesus says in ***Matthew 11 v 28-29, ... Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.***

TAKE CARE

You may already attend a church and have experienced child baptism and/or confirmation. You may already pray and read your Bible. You may do good deeds and lead an honest life. If so, that is really good. However, the Bible clearly shows us that this is not the way God has provided for us to have our sin forgiven and cancelled out, for us to have our relationship with Him restored and to spend eternity with Him.

Once we have responded to God the way He wants us to then these activities will become a natural part of our everyday life. However, on their own they have no part in securing our destiny (which the Bibles calls our ‘salvation’). In ***Ephesians 2 v 8-9*** it says, ***For it is by grace you have been saved – and it is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.***

You may believe you are not good enough or worthy to receive God’s free gift of salvation. You may feel you need to try to better yourself in some way before being able to receive His free gift. Please understand that Jesus came to save you from the consequences of your sin, no matter what kind of life you have led or what condition you believe yourself to be in. Don’t wait till you feel good enough to come to Jesus – come as you are. He came to seek sinners, not those who already believe they are good

enough. Jesus says, ... ***For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. Matthew 9 v 13.***

TIME IS SHORT

There are many things in life we know we ought to do but somehow we find a reason or excuse to delay. I strongly urge you not to let this happen to your response to what you have just read. The Bible tells us what the world will be like as the end draws near, ***But mark this; there will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. 2 Timothy 3 v 1-4.*** In the gospel of ***Matthew 24 v 7-8*** it also says, ***Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.***

These bear an uncomfortably close resemblance to the world we see and hear about today, so time is clearly running out. Don't let it run out for you, don't ignore or reject God's free gift of salvation and His plan and purpose for your life and eternity. The Bible says, ***I tell you now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation. 2 Corinthians 6 v 2.***

NOW WHAT?

A warm welcome awaits you in your new family now that you have become a Christian, a child of God. It will be really good for you to tell your friends and family. As soon as possible you should become part of a church where you can worship God, get to know Him and enjoy good fellowship with other Christians. You will also need to be baptised. So take this further step and begin to experience life as God intended.

If you have any questions or would simply like to talk about what you have just read, the person who gave you this booklet will be able to help. In any event please feel free to contact us directly at:

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