

HOW CHRISTIANS VIEW THE AFTERLIFE

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Last evening, a guest in our home asked this question--late, too late for a long conversation. The guest is leaving early this morning, so--dissatisfied with last evening's Q/A (question/answer), which left the guest somewhat puzzled--I dashed this off before breakfast & put it (with a personal intro) by the door of the guest, who at breakfast was pleased & grateful.

A few quick notes:

- 1 The universe is **moral**, so promises/threats, rewards/punishments apply to both sides of death. God is both Judge & (through his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord) Redeemer.
- 2 Except as he chooses to **reveal** himself & his purposes (Deus revelatus), God is unknown (hidden, Deus absconditus) to us--as a ball on a table is known to the table only at the point of tangency, the touch-point. We can trust the Bible in the Holy Spirit to provide us with "all things necessary for our salvation." But these things do not include what happens to nonChristians at death. Evil will be destroyed, but the Eternal Mercies will be victorious--so nothing good will ever be lost.
- 3 The Christian **hope** is not just for ourselves but for all creation. It can be corrupted by (1) universalization (ie, the afterlife is better for everybody without regard to behavior this side of death), (2) a narrow-minded, ungenerous spirit (pontificating on what happens to "them" while "we" are safe), or (3) individualism (selfish self-concern--which I can say by saying "If you have to get to heaven, you won't").
- 4 The creator makes us persons-in-**community**. I believe that we are that both sides of death. I don't have time at this writing (you are about to leave Craigville for home) to write down the Scripture references that are popping into my mind; but I can assure you that I'm not saying anything here that is distant from, or adverse to the great sweep of, the Bible.
On the other side of death, we'll still be persons-in-community. Will that include the restoration of relationships that became dear to us this side of death? I'm increasingly inclined to think so, within the conviction that the divine Benevolence does not permit any good to be lost. But too much yearning for that slips into family-worship (not the family worshipping God, but--the Mormon temptation--the family worshipping itself). What should ever be in mind here is....
- 5that we "walk into the arms of **God**": as God's love is the source of all, loving God is the point of all--as in the great hymn "When in our music God is glorified / and adoration leave no room for pride, / it is as if the whole creation cried / 'Alleluia!'"
- 6 Where does the **resurrection** come in?
 - (1) The resurrection is God's action of restoring the whole fallen creation, not just spirits. The resurrected Jesus was a bodysoul, soulbody--though transfigured.
 - (2) God will bring us eventually into the resurrected life we have a foretaste of in our Lord's resurrection.
 - (3) Our resurrection is connected with the mysterious event we call the end of history-as-we-know-it, sometime in a future unknowable now to us. Even the word "future" is ambiguous in this context, because the very word "time" is ambiguous here. To say that there's an "intermediate state" before our resurrection is to use the linear, time-line picture that does not bear the weight of such further questioning as "What are our spirits doing between death & when we get our 'spiritual bodies'?"
- 6 When we die, we "walk into the arms of God." Jesus said to the dying thief, "You will be with me in paradise **today**."* And various passages in the 2nd $\frac{1}{2}$ of the New Testament affirm that after death, we are immediately in God's presence: study especially 2 Corinthians 4 & 5 (5:8 NIV: "We...would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord"). (* Luke 23:43)
- 7 Instead of dwelling on the future, we should so live in the **present** as to "do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).