

Instruction In The Westminster Standards

The Historic Standards of Presbyterian Denominations.

STUDIES IN THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

Q. 37 What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?

A. The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.

Scripture References: Luke 23:43. Luke 16:23. Phil. 1:23. II Cor. 5:6-8. I Thes. 4:14. Rom. 8:23.

Questions

1. When believers die what benefits are received?
The believer receives a benefit in regard to his soul and in regard to his body.
2. What benefit is received of the believer in regard to his soul?
Heb. 12:23 teaches that the soul is made perfect in holiness and immediately passes into glory.
3. How is the believer benefited with respect to his body?
The body of the believer in the grave will still be united to Christ in a mystical union (I Cor. 6:15). At the resurrection the body of the believer will be united with his soul.
4. What is this "resurrection" spoken of in the prior question?
This resurrection is the last and general resurrection of all the dead in the last day (I Thess. 4:16).
5. What is the lot of the souls and bodies of the unbelievers?
The bodies of the unbelievers are shut up in the prison of the grave (Dan. 12:2) and their souls suffer the anguish and torment of hell.
6. Will the believer be raised with the same body at the last day?
Yes, the dead in Christ shall be raised with the same body (Job 19:26). There will be a difference in quality, not in substance and essence. (Phil. 3:20-21).
7. How can a believer be assured of these blessings when death is nigh?
A believer can be assured of them because the promises of God are sure and true, promises made even before the world began (2 Tim. 1:9). There need be no doubt on the part of the believer for "What the Bible says, God says, and that ends the matter!"

DEATH AND THE BELIEVER

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." (Ps. 23:4). In this wonderful verse from God's Word we have a comfort for the Christian that includes all man needs to face death itself. There is the Presence—"for Thou art with me." There is the Defender—"Thy rod and Thy staff comfort me." The rod was a most formidable weapon of defence. Our Lord defends us from all. There is the One who guides—"Thy rod and Thy staff comfort me." The staff is a guidance in the sense of pointing out the way. All of this in one verse of Scripture, all this and Heaven too!

The poet, E. H. Hamilton, put it well when he said:

"Afraid? Of What?
To feel the spirit's glad release?
To pass from pain to perfect
peace?
The strife and strain of life to
cease?"

Afraid?—of that?

Afraid? Of What?
Afraid to see the Saviour's face,
To hear His welcome, and to
trace
The glory gleam from wounds
of grace?

Afraid?—of that?

Afraid? Of What?
A flash - a crash - a pierced
heart;
Darkness-light-O heaven's art!
A wound, of His counterpart!

Afraid?—of that?

Afraid? Of What?
To do by death what life could
not—
Baptize with blood a stony plot,
Till souls shall blossom from
the spot?

Afraid?—of that?

The believer should note that this particular Question begins with "What benefits". So many times it seems that the believer does not realize that there are benefits to receive at death. When a believer dies there will be those who will miss him. It is true that it is hard to think of what life would be like without those closest to us. It is equally true though that the Bible says, "To be with Christ is far better."

Many years ago I opened a letter from the Mother of one of my former Professors, a godly man who meant so much to me as a young Christian. She told of his sudden death. I reached back and took a book from the shelf, a book I had received from him just a few months before. In the midst of my sadness and grief this Question suddenly came to my mind and burned itself into my soul. I went again to the Scripture references and looked them up. I was able, by God's grace, to praise Him for taking my brother in Christ to Himself!

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