

GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Returning to Our Roots

STUDY SEVENTEEN

Visiting the Real Twilight Zone

2 Corinthians 4:14–18; 5:1–8

Everybody has an eternal soul. The question is this: Where will you spend your eternity?

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE subject of death fascinates people . . . and frightens them. They long to look behind the veil that shrouds the afterlife, and yet they shudder to think what they might find.

Through His Word, God calms our fears about death by shining the light of truth on it. It may surprise you to know that God created humans to live forever. Death was not in God’s original blueprint for creation. Adam and Eve planted death’s seed in the soil of humanity when they sinned against God (Genesis 2:16–17; 3:1–7), and, as a result of their disobedience,

sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.
(Romans 5:12)

From the moment we take our first breath as a newborn, our biological clocks start ticking away our time on earth. According to the Scriptures, “Each person is destined to die” (Hebrews 9:27); “No one can escape the power of the grave” (Psalm 89:48).

And yet, while inevitable, death is not the end. We walk *through* the valley of the shadow of death, and we need not fear because the Lord walks “close beside [us]” (Psalm 23:4). Where does He lead us? What will greet us on the other side? What happens after death? Let’s look behind the veil and find out.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Invite the Lord to deepen your understanding of death and the afterlife.

Father, I admit that death is a frightening subject, and I worry about those I love who do not know You. Assure me of Your control over matters that are out of my hands. Lead me through the mist of uncertainty into the light of Your presence and truth. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The Scriptures not only reveal death's origin, but they also tell us what happens when we die. In [2 Corinthians 5:1–8](#), Paul used an analogy of a “tent” to describe our mortal bodies, and then, he switched to “house” to describe our bodies after they are resurrected. Read this passage once through, slowly and thoughtfully, before answering the questions below.



Observation: What Happens After Death?

In this passage, Paul was talking to Christians—those who had placed their faith in Jesus as their Savior. What did Paul say happens to the “earthly tent” at death, according to [2 Corinthians 5:1](#)? What does the “house in heaven” refer to?



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In *2 Corinthians 5:2–4*, how did Paul describe what it's like to live in “earthly bodies”? What metaphor did Paul use to describe receiving our “new bodies”? What will happen to our “dying bodies”?

What wonderful assurance did Paul communicate to his readers in *5:5–8*?

When death occurs, the soul and spirit are removed instantaneously from the physical body which has died. The inner part—the people we really are—is taken into the presence of the Lord. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

How did Paul contrast physical bodies with eternal spirits in *2 Corinthians 4:16–18*? What distinction did he make?



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In a word, death is *separation*. When a person dies, the soul leaves the body as the inner part of us is separated from the outer. At a funeral, we see merely the physical shell—the body of the person—lying in the casket. The soul of the person has already departed.

For Christians, the soul immediately goes to heaven to be with God—“to be absent from the body” is “to be at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8 NASB). But what happens to non-Christians?

What warning did Jesus give unbelievers in *Matthew 25:31–33, 41*?

What did John see in his vision of the final judgment in *Revelation 20:11–15*? How is John’s vision similar to Jesus’ teaching?

In *Mark 9:43–48*, Jesus used what phrases to describe the place of judgment?



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These images of suffering are terrifying, and our hearts ache for the lost. In the next *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll consider important questions about the destiny of unbelievers—such as the question, “How can a loving God send people to hell?” For now, let's examine the meaning of the passages we've studied.



Interpretation: The Afterlife for the Saved and the Lost

In Paul's teaching on death, he said our bodies are “earthly tents we live in” (2 Corinthians 5:1). In what ways are our earthly bodies like tents and our eternal bodies like houses?

According to Paul, why do we “grow weary” (5:2)? And why do “we groan and sigh” (5:4)?

What did Paul mean when he wrote “these bodies will be swallowed up by life” (5:4)? When will that occur, according to *1 Corinthians 15:21–23*?



Visiting the Real Twilight Zone

2 Corinthians 4:14–18; 5:1–8

Our souls depart from our bodies at death, but God did not intend for us to be disembodied spirits, “spirits without bodies,” forever (2 Corinthians 5:3). Rather, God “prepared us for this”—that is, for eternal life in glorified bodies; and “as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit” (2 Corinthians 5:4). According to *Ephesians 1:13–14*, when did God give us his Holy Spirit as a guarantee?

Based on the passages you’ve studied, summarize what happens to believers when they die. What happens to their earthly bodies? Where do their souls go? What glory do they look forward to?

In contrast, summarize what happens to unbelievers when they die. What happens to their earthly bodies? Where do their souls go? What happens when they are raised to judgment?



Visiting the Real Twilight Zone

2 Corinthians 4:14–18; 5:1–8

When the believer dies, the body goes into the grave and the soul goes immediately to be with the Lord Jesus, awaiting resurrection. When the unbeliever dies, the body goes into the grave, and the soul goes into Hades or hell. There the person awaits the judgment of the lost. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Central Issue

What determines a person's destiny? What did John say is the central issue in *1 John 5:10–12*?

What assurance did John offer in *5:13*?

By putting your faith in Jesus as your Savior who bore your judgment on the cross and rose from the grave, you can know with *certainty* that you have eternal life. Even the fingers of death cannot pry you out of God's loving hand.

I am convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love. Nether death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries for tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38–39)



Visiting the Real Twilight Zone

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Application: Response and Result

Every person will face death one day, but, with Christ as your Savior, you don't have to be afraid. Jesus bore sin's curse and freed you from judgment. Rest assured that you have "victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57). One day, death will be no more!

Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled:

"Death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?" (15:54–55)

What are your feelings about death?

What relief do the passages in this study give you? What truth or truths stood out as the most reassuring?



Visiting the Real Twilight Zone

2 Corinthians 4:14–18; 5:1–8

Who do you know who needs this assurance? Write their names here and pray for an opportunity to share these Scriptures with them.

Our journey through the afterlife continues with “An Interview with One from Beyond” in the next *Searching the Scriptures* study. Jesus Himself conducts the interview through an account of two men who died, so we know the facts are true and the lesson He teaches contains wisdom beyond anything of this world.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the promise of my eternal house—my glorified body You will make for me at the future resurrection. Thank You, also, for the promise that, one day, when I close my eyes in death, I will open them to see Your face. What a relief to know that death has lost its power and I am secure in the Lord Jesus Christ. In His name, amen.



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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

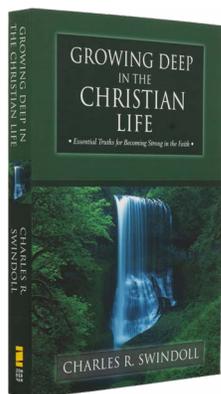
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Visiting the Real Twilight Zone

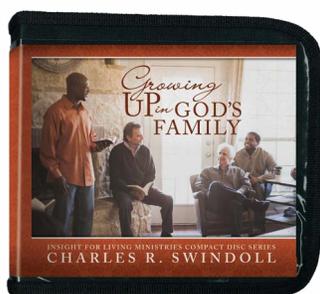
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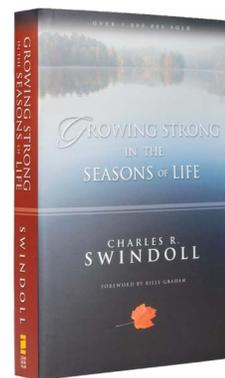
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For the 2023 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president, *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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10