

## Second Chance After Death?

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What happens when a person dies? Since death happens to everyone eventually, the question is frequently pondered. Will there be a second chance at life? What happens to our loved ones when they die? Can the living do anything to make the afterlife of the dead better? There are a number of teachings on the topic of death and afterlife. Some theories say that there is nothing after life. Many eastern theologies believe in reincarnation. Christianity speaks of Hades and then an all encompassing judgment. Catholicism speaks of purgatory. The concepts of prayer, baptism, and preaching for the dead, as well as purgatory, are related items which will be examined in this article. That such beliefs have been present for ages is not argued. From a Biblical point of reference, is there authorization for belief in these teachings?

### Prayer for the Dead

Praying for the dead is an ancient practice to which there is no particular point of origin. Though the passage of **2 Maccabees 12:43-46** is part of writings not included in most Bibles, many of those who hold to the practice of praying for the dead start there for affirmation of their conviction. That particular passage states the following speaking of the Jew Judas Maccabees:

*"He then took up a collection among all his soldiers, amounting to two thousand silver drachmas, which he sent to Jerusalem to provide for an expiatory sacrifice. In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way, inasmuch as he had the resurrection of the dead in view; for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death. But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from sin."*

Not only seen in this verse is the idea of praying for the dead, but atoning for their sins which leads to the concept of indulgences and purgatory. However, these last two concepts can be put on hold for a moment. This passage, weak because it is predominantly not viewed as inspired, demonstrates the practice of praying for the dead did occur. However, it far from validates the behavior. The Jews engaged a number of recorded behaviors which were not pleasing to God. Many of these behaviors are pointed out throughout the Old Testament and the New. How can it be determined if their example was good or bad? Man Biblically determines authority for his actions the way any person learns authority: Commands, approved examples, and necessary inferences (those based on truth). Though Judas Maccabees provides an example, his actions were not commanded or approved of by God and cannot therefore have authority. This passage does not authorize prayer for the dead. Further scriptural passages must be examined.

**2 Timothy 1:16-18** is an inspired Biblical passage which many "prayer for the dead" proponents look to for authorization. Here is how that passage reads adjusting the translator inserted punctuation not in any original Biblical text:

*"The Lord grant mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus: for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but, when he was in Rome, he sought me diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him to find mercy of the Lord in that day and in how many things he ministered at Ephesus. Thou knowest very well."*

For those first reading this passage, they are likely not to see the connection at all to prayer for the dead. The connection is made by assuming the gentleman, Onesiphorus, is dead. Then the words "the Lord grant unto him to find mercy of the Lord in that day" is believed to be a prayer for him. First, there is no evidence in all of scripture stating Onesiphorus was dead at the time. Second, in context the apostle was speaking of his own imprisonment and how disciples had turned from him. Yet, Onesiphorus stood by him and cared for him. Paul then hopes God is merciful to Onesiphorus because of the care he gave during that time or "day". Why would he need mercy and from what? He would need mercy from potential persecution from Paul's persecutors or those who fled him.

Prayer for the dead has nothing to do with this passage. Such an explanation of this passage further sheds dubiousness on the idea of prayer for the dead. There is no authority for such an action in this passage.

A third popular passage established as prayer for the dead is **John 11:41-43**. The context is the man Lazarus is dead. Jesus comes to his tomb and before bringing him to life, tells Martha she will see the glory of God. He then prays to the Father in thankfulness that he could attribute what would happen next to the glory of Him. Following this Jesus tells Lazarus to "come forth". Lazarus returns to life. The prayer was in no sense for Lazarus or his wellbeing in the afterlife. The prayer was a prayer of thankfulness that Jesus had opportunity to glorify God. Again, there is no authorization for prayer for the dead in this passage. From the three passages examined, it is seen the supposed examples of authorized prayer for the dead are weak and truthfully, non-existent.

### **Baptism for the Dead**

If it can be demonstrated an individual is baptized for the dead, though there are no examples of prayer for the dead, it is assumed one can pray for that individual's welfare stemming from the baptism. Baptism is for the forgiveness of sins and therefore, salvation (**Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16, I Peter 3:21**). If an individual can be baptized for a dead person, then they can ensure the salvation of the individual in the afterlife. To validate such a belief, the passage of **I Corinthians 15:29** is used:

*"Else what shall they do that are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for the dead?"*

First, it is important to note that the very last word of the passage, "dead", is present in the Greek, yet, many translations rather than use "dead" insert the word "them" giving rise to confusion. Second, the context is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Some doubted the resurrection as they do today. Paul establishes in **I Corinthians 15:29** that men are baptized because of Christ (**Romans 6:3-11**). If Christ is dead and not raised, why would anyone be baptized? Why would they be baptized for a dead guy? The point is: they weren't baptized for a dead guy, but Christ who was alive, had been witness by man, and then ascended to heaven. Baptism for the dead though practiced by different collections of people past and present has no scriptural authority.

### **Preaching for the Dead**

If it can be demonstrated the dead are preached to in the afterlife so they can have a second chance, then one can logically pray for their acceptance. **Ephesians 4:8-10** speaks of Jesus Christ ascending to heaven. Then the term "ascended" is examined. The question is asked "what does it mean except that he also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?" From this and a verse we will examine in a moment, it is assumed that Christ was going somewhere below the earth's surface. The following verses use the term "under the earth" in possible relation to people located there: **Philippians 2:10, Revelation 5:3, and Revelation 5:13**. Many commentators simply refer to the lower parts of the earth as earth itself, however, it can be appropriately discerned as well that the Hadean realm (realm of those physically dead) is referenced. Is the official location of such a place below the earth's surface? Most likely not, but the since this is where bodies are buried it is referenced as such. Hades as seen in Luke 16 is divided by such a gulf as cannot be spanned. It consists of a place of torment and what Jesus would call Paradise. Jesus when he died went to the portion of Hades called paradise (**Luke 23:43**). Jesus did not stay in Hades but was resurrected (**Acts 2:27**). **Ephesians 4:8** speaks of Christ leading captive captivity. What is meant by this is that through Christ's death, burial, and resurrection faithful man was no longer held in captivity under sin. The truth being that without Christ, all men are left in their sins (**I Corinthians 15:17**).

Because Christ was among those no longer physically living (though with the faithful in paradise), the text of **I Peter 3: 18-20** stands as a beacon of hope to those holding to the theory Christ spoke to the dead:

*"Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison, that aforetime were disobedient, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water:"*

This text is read by some to say Christ literally went and spoke to the disobedient. If that were so, it was only to the disobedient of Noah's time being punished (torment portion of Hades). That would sort of kill the idea that God is not partial (**Romans 2:11**), but it would show he preached to the dead. Fortunately this verse can easily be explained without contradicting scripture. In the same fashion which Israel in the time of Moses drank from the spiritual Rock that was Christ (**I Corinthians 10:4**), so did the living, disobedient people of Noah's time have the same opportunity to drink of Christ as Noah preached to them (**2 Peter 2:5**). There is no authority for baptism of the dead.

It is an interesting concept which states a person could be selfish and disobedient in this life then, with the realization after death that God is real and demands obedience, renounce their sin and be saved. Why preach on earth? Just preach after death! It would be wonderful if man could pray those who died in their sins out of their condemnation. It would be great if man simply had to be

baptized for the condemned so they could be pure. Masses of people would be in the water all day long. However a man can deliver only his own soul as Ezekiel stated:

**Ezekiel 14:13-14** – *Son of man, when a land sinneth against me by committing a trespass, and I stretch out my hand upon it, and break the staff of the bread thereof, and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast; though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord Jehovah.*

Having examined prayer, preaching, and baptism for the dead, the related topic of purgatory will now be broached.

### **Purgatory for the Dead**

That man must be holy before God is without question. It is a concept backed by **Isaiah 59:1-2**, **Hebrews 12:14**, and **Revelation 21:27** as well as a host of other verses. However, how man is purified to stand before God is a question pertaining to purgatory. The concept of purgatory suggests man must be purified in the flesh and after his death to be able to stand before God. The tarnish by venial sins (not so bad sins) for which there has been no repentance or insufficient temporal (earthly) payment must be cleansed away by fire according to purgatory proponents. Purgatory stated directly is: punishment inflicted after death to bring about the pure state of an individual.

**1 Corinthians 3:11-15** is often used to explain the state of purification by fire, however, such an explanation is misinterpretation and out of context. The passage speaks of the fact that the Church is built of individual souls. When men preach the Word of God to others they build up the Church. However, not every person receiving the word stays committed to Christ (**Matthew 13:18-23**). Men whose material makeup is a commitment to Christ (Gold, silver, precious stone) will stand the earthly test of trials and temptation. Men whose material makeup is corrupt, perishable, compared to wood, hay, and straw will fail the test. Ultimately, these men will perish, but an individual who was true will be saved. He will be saved as well as those he worked with who were true to Christ. To say this passage has to do with an afterlife punishment to purify a man is a mistake. When a man dies, his state is already determined as seen in **Luke 16**. It is at that point he simply waits the final deliverance of eternal punishment or reward.

Still, **Matthew 5:25-26** and **Matthew 18:23-35** are used as examples sins can ultimately be paid for through punishment. In the case of the former, a man is thrown in jail by a judge in regard to a legal matter and said to not be able to come out until the last cent is paid. In the case of the latter, a man who owed his master a great debt was turned over to torturers until his debt was paid. While both of these discuss punishment in full, the focus of their texts is not the punishment. In **Matthew 5** the focus is making peace with your fellow man. In **Matthew 18** the discussion was the idea of forgiveness. Forgiveness was given through the Lord. However, when the man refused to repent and act as his master he was sentenced to punishment. To make the verses about punishment after death is to twist the meaning of the scriptures.

The Bible has much to say about the punishment awaiting man who does not repent. **Luke 16:25-26** establishes there is no crossing over from punishment to freedom. **Daniel 12:1-2** notes that there are two choices in life: everlasting contempt and everlasting life. There is no partial contempt just as there is no partial everlasting life. **Jude 1:7** speaks of Sodom and Gomorrah suffering eternal punishment, not a punishment that was limited because they paid enough price. In **Matthew 25:46**, Christ speaks of punishment for the unmerciful in life, he says they will go to eternal punishment. To suggest a purgatory that could be paid for by indulgences or penalty is not scriptural. If sins could be paid for by the blood of bulls and goats, Christ's sacrifice would not have been needed (**Hebrews 10:4**). If the sins of man could be paid for by their own blood and pain and work, Christ's sacrifice would not have been needed (**Hebrews 10:11**). However, nothing done by man on earth or after his life on earth could ever make man pure before God. Sin separates man from God. It is only through Christ that man can come to God (**John 14:6**). The doctrine of purgatory is false teaching and has no authority through the scriptures.

Praying for the dead will not help them. They have cast their lot upon the earth (**2 Corinthians 5:10**). Being baptized for the dead will only get a man wet. Preaching to the dead is a fairy tale. Purgatory is only wishful thinking. There is no authority for these doctrines. If a man does not want to worry about his death, he should submit to God (**Matthew 5:3**). If he is concerned about the salvation of others, he should preach to them the gospel of Christ (**Mark 16:15**). There will come a day when all knees will bow before the Lord. There will be those who call upon his name for salvation. For those who did not love him and failed to be obedient to His will upon this earth, Jesus has a response:

**Matthew 7:23** – *And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'*

The dead are beyond our grasp. Concern yourselves with the living. Find eternal life in Christ. Our God is not a God of the dead, but a God of the living.

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