



STATEMENT DT085

## **Questions and Answers on the Bible, the Cults, the Occult, and Aberrant Christian Teachings**

*The Newsletter staff is pleased to introduce this new column, based on questions and answers excerpted from “The Bible Answer Man.” CRI’s live call-in radio broadcast.*

*In this issue of the Newsletter, Craig Hawkins answers questions on death and the afterlife.*

### ***What happens to Christians after they die? Do they “go to sleep” until the future resurrection?***

The apostle Paul tells us that “to die is gain,” and that he personally desired “to depart [die] and be with Christ, which is better by far” (Phil. 1:21-23). Moreover, in 2 Corinthians 5:8 he affirms, “We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” Paul clearly anticipated something far more glorious and wonderful than mere “sleep” or unconsciousness. Those who die in the Lord are immediately ushered into the very presence of God!

### ***What happens to non-Christians after they die?***

Upon death, the non-Christian goes to a place of punishment while awaiting judgment by Christ. In 2 Peter 2:9, we are told that “the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and *to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.*”

Revelation 20:11-15 describes this day of judgment — the Great White Throne Judgment — and the final condition of the unsaved. Following this judgment, the unsaved will suffer eternal separation from God. This sobering reality should motivate Christians to daily share the gospel of salvation to the lost.

### ***How do you reconcile Luke 23:43, where Jesus said to one of the thieves on the cross “today you will be with me in paradise,” with John 20:17, where we are told that on the third day after His death “I have not yet returned to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God”? In the latter passage, it seems that Christ has not yet gone to paradise.***

Theologians have different views as to how this question should be answered. The following is a well-accepted explanation. In Luke 16:22-26, we see that *hades* (the equivalent of *sheol* in the Old Testament) is divided into two separate realms: “hell,” where the unrighteous go after death; and “paradise” or “Abraham’s Bosom,” the place of rest for the righteous. The two realms together comprised *hades* — though they were separated by a great chasm or gulf that could not be bridged by inhabitants of either side.

Christ descended into the “paradise” compartment of *hades* when He died (1 Pet. 3:18-20), and when the thief on the cross died he went there too. Thus, the thief was with Christ that day in paradise, yet Christ had not yet ascended into heaven. When Christ did ascend into heaven (John 20:17), He took the rest of the inhabitants of paradise (i.e., all the Old Testament saints) with Him (Eph. 4:8-9) — including the thief on the cross. So, there is no contradiction between Luke 23:43 and John 20:17.

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