

CHURCH.

LESSON 21

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray for God’s guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about church building to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) <i>[QUIET TIMES]</i> 2 THESSALONIANS 1 -3
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Take turns and **share (or read)** from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times out of the assigned Bible passages (2 Thessalonians 1 - 3). Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) <i>[KEY VERSES IN JOHN]</i> (8) JOHN 7:38
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Review two by two.

(8) John 7:38. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.

4	TEACHING (85 minutes) <i>[CHURCH CEREMONY]</i> CHRISTIAN FUNERAL
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Introduce. This teaching is about the Christian funeral. We will learn what the Bible teaches about death, what happens after death, the funeral ceremony and the resurrection from the dead.

A. THE NATURE OF MAN

1. Unbiblical views of the nature of man.

People in the world have different views about the nature of man.

(1) The view of Philo. The nature of man consists of three parts.

This view is based on the philosophy of Philo (20 B.C. – 45 A.D., Alexandria). Philo taught that man is a trinity: man has a spirit, has a soul and has a body. This view makes a further distinction between a man’s “spirit” and “soul”, between his “spiritual” life and his “soulish” life. The spirit apprehends divine philosophy and the soul apprehends human philosophy.

This notion is popularised in the West by assigning specific functions to the spirit and separate functions to the soul and to the body.

- The functions of the spirit are said to be spiritual knowledge of a god and fellowship with that god, conscience, intuition and creativity.
- The functions of the soul are limited to thinking (the mind), to deciding and choosing (the will) and to feeling the different emotions (the heart).
- The functions of the body are reduced to the five senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling.

This division is an over-simplification of reality and not biblical.

(2) The view of Plotinus. The nature of man consists of two parts.

This view was popular with the ancient cultures in the East (India) and the West (Greece). The view of many people in the modern world is based on the neo-Platonic philosophy of Plotinus (269 A.D., Alexandria). Plotinus taught that man is a duality: man has a body and a soul (or a spirit). This view distinguishes between the body that is only physical and the soul that is only spiritual. Consequently man is able to keep his physical and psychological functions apart.

They believe that the functions of his body and the functions of his soul do not influence one another. Man could live one kind of life in his body and another kind of life in his soul. For example, he could live a carnal life in his body and a religious life in his soul. Generally the soul is regarded as the essential being of man and the body is regarded as something evil. The spirit (or soul) is the prisoner of the body until it is set free from the body at death. The consequence is that only the soul is regarded as important and the physical body and all physical creation are regarded as unimportant. For example, it is important to go to church on Sunday and save your soul, but it is not important how you live the rest of the week in your body in this world. Historically this view has had disastrous influence on Christianity. This division is not biblical.

(3) The naturalistic view. The nature of man is a physical unity.

This view is purely naturalistic. This view believes that man only consists of some physical and chemical elements that change in evolution, but that man has no spirit (or soul) at all.

2. The biblical view of the nature of man: man is a physical and spiritual unity.

(1) Man does not have a soul, but is a soul.

God's revelation in the Bible does not support the three views above. The Bible does not teach that man "has a soul", but the Bible teaches that man "is a living soul". The literal translation of Genesis 2:7 is: "The Lord God formed the man, [who was] dust of the ground, and breathed (or blew) into his nostrils the breath (or spirit) of life (Hebrew: nishmat chajim), by which the man became a living soul (or a living being)(Hebrew: nefesh; Greek: psuché; English" soul)". Genesis 2:7 describes how God created man. He formed Adam (which means man), from the elements of the ground and blew his "spirit" (breath) into Adam's nostrils. Thus Adam (with his body and his spirit) became "a living soul" or "a living being".

The nature of man is unique: Man is a soul (being) that has two sides: a visible physical side (the body) and an invisible spiritual side (the spirit)! Man's soul (being) consists of a body and a spirit! Man is therefore a unity and not a duality and also not a trinity! His body belongs to the created material world, but his spirit comes from God and reveals that man is the image bearer of God. This biblical view of the nature of man determines how Christians view themselves: that they are creatures of God (and not merely a product of evolution), that they have sinned (against God) and that they will die and therefore need salvation (by God).

(2) The Christian view of man.

The Bible regards the essential nature of man, not as a duality, but as a unity (a living soul), consisting of a physical side (body) and a spiritual side (spirit). Man is "a living soul", that is, a living being with a visible body and an invisible spirit. His two sides (visible body and invisible spirit) can be distinguished, but cannot be separated in this life on earth!

In the Old Testament God instituted the moral law, the ceremonial law and the civil law and these laws affected the spiritual-, moral-, social- and physical life of the Old Testament believers. These Old Testament laws served to teach God's people that not only the spiritual aspect, but also every other aspect of human life is important for God!

The Christian views himself as a unity: he is a living being (soul) with a visible body and an invisible spirit. Because his soul (his being) has two sides: a visible physical side (the body) and an invisible spiritual side (the spirit), the Christian is concerned with both his body and his spirit. How he lives his daily life with his inseparable body and spirit in this world is very important. God wants all Christians to live holy and godly lives, not only in their spirits, but also in their bodies, in this world (Romans 6:12-13,19; 2 Peter 3:10-14).

The Christian does not regard his physical body as evil. The physical body of the Christian is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20). The Christian should not create a division between his body and his spirit either in his mind or in his daily life. As long as he lives on this present earth his body and his spirit are inseparable! And God calls the Christian to glorify him in his body and in his spirit.

(3) The Christian view of the fall into sin.

The fall of Adam and Eve in sin affected the whole being (soul) of man. The whole man (soul) with his body and spirit fell into sin, missed God's purpose and intention. The fall into sin affected every area of his spiritual relationship to God, his social relationship to his neighbour, his psychological (intellectual, volitional, emotional) relationship to himself and his physical relationship to the created world (Genesis chapter 3). That is why the Bible regards a person without spiritual life as a *dead* person (Ephesians 2:1). The whole man fell into sin. The whole man is affected by sin and death. The whole man is known by God and will be judged by God (Hebrews 4:12-13).

(4) The Christian view of physical death.

The Christian does not regard the rest of God's physical creation as evil. The rest of God's physical creation does not have a spirit as man has. Genesis 1:27 and 2:17 do not imply that the rest of God's physical creation was exempt from physical death before man fell into sin.

Before the fall of man into sin all vegetation was created mortal, because fruits and plants die when they are eaten (Genesis 1:29-30; 2:16). Before the fall of man into sin, the earth had thorns and thistles because God had *finished* everything he had created (Genesis 2:1). Nevertheless, man had to work in the Garden of Eden and take care of it, for example by pulling up thorns and thistles (Genesis 2:15). But after the fall of man into sin, the ground was *cursed* and man had to exert painful toil to control the thorns and thistles it produced (Genesis 3:17-18).

Before the fall into sin, snakes existed (Genesis 1:24; 3:1). But after the fall of man into sin, the snake was *cursed* above all other animals and became an enemy of man (Genesis 3:14-15). Before the fall of man into sin all other living creatures like wild animals, domestic animals and creatures that move along the ground were created mortal.

Before the fall of man into sin, the woman would have suffered pain in childbearing. After the fall of man into sin, God *increased* the pains of the woman in childbearing (Genesis 3:16).

Before the fall of man into sin, only man was created immortal, because only man was created in the image of God. But after man's fall into sin, man became mortal (transient) and his created body returned to the elements of the earth (Genesis 3:19). After the fall of man into sin the whole creation was subjected to the bondage and the frustration of physical decay (Romans 8:19-22). But physical decay and death does not make God's physical creation or the physical bodies of people evil! At the second coming of Jesus Christ the physical bodies of all people will be resurrected and possess immortality (John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:42-44) and the whole physical universe will be restored to a complete righteous universe (Acts 3:21; 2 Peter 3:10-14)!

(5) The Christian view of salvation.

"He who wins souls is wise" (Proverbs 11:30). The soul of man is not just his spirit, but consists of his spirit and his body! The whole man (soul = body and spirit) fell into sin. The whole man: spirit and body is in need of salvation.

Jesus Christ came to save the whole man. He came to save both his invisible spiritual side (his spirit) and his visible physical side (his body). He forgives sins, but also heals sicknesses, releases those oppressed by demons and sets prisoners free (Mark 2:10-11,17; Luke 4:18-19). He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing (Deuteronomy 10:18; 1 John 3:17). Jesus Christ sanctifies the whole Christian (1 Thessalonians 5:23). In the future Jesus Christ will glorify the whole Christian: his spirit (1 John 3:1-3) and his body (Philippians 3:21).

Therefore, to win souls is to be concerned with both a person's body and a person's spirit. Christian ministry is holistic. Christians are called to be concerned with the whole man and with every aspect of his life (cf. Luke 2:52).

3. The words "soul" and "spirit" in the Bible.

(1) The words may have the same meaning.

The word "soul" (Greek: psuché) occurs about 100 times in the New Testament. The word "spirit" (Greek: pneuma) occurs more than 370 times in the New Testament. It is impossible to draw a sharp distinction between these two words, in spite of the fact that it is often done.

The various distinctions between these two words are much more complicated. Examples:

- The Greek equivalent for *breath* can be psuché (soul)(Acts 20:10) or pneuma (spirit)(2 Thessalonians 2:8).
- The Greek equivalent for *life* with emphasis on the physical life can be psuché (soul)(Matthew 2:20) or pneuma (spirit)(Luke 8:55).
- Man's psuché (soul) can be stirred up (Mark 14:34) and his pneuma (spirit) can be provoked (Acts 17:16).
- Man's psuché (soul) magnifies the Lord (Luke 1:46) and his pneuma (spirit) rejoices in God (Luke 1:47).
- Man's incorporeal being is called a psuché (soul) (Revelation 6:9) and it is also called a pneuma (spirit)(Hebrews 12:23).
- Man's psuché (soul) may refer to his entire self or person (Mark 10:45; 1 Timothy 2:6), but his disposition may be called a pneuma (spirit) of gentleness (1 Corinthians 4:21).

(2) The words may have distinct meanings.

In general the word "soul" (psuché) stresses *emotional* activity and the word "spirit" (pneuma) stresses *mental* activity. The soul is sorrowful (Matthew 26:38) and loves (Mark 12:30), while the spirit perceives (Mark 2:8), plans (Acts 19:21), knows (1 Corinthians 2:11) and prays (1 Corinthians 14:14).

Often the "soul" is broader in scope indicating the sum-total of life that rises above the physical, while the "spirit" is more restricted and indicates the human spirit in its relation to God, man's self-consciousness or personality viewed as the subject in acts of worship or in acts related to worship, such as praying and bearing witness.

4. Understanding the words "spirit", "soul" and "body" in 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

(1) The literal Greek text and its literal translation.

Αυτος ο Θεος της ειρηνης αγιασαι υμας ολοτελεις,
Himself / the God of peace / sanctify / you / *wholly* (to the complete end); /

και ολοκληρον υμων το πνευμα

And / *in every part* (complete, sound, undamaged)(be/be preserved) / your spirit (you yourself, especially in relationship to God); /

και η ψυχη και το σωμα αμεμπτως εν τη παρουσια του κυριου ημων Ιησου Χριστου τηρηθεινη

And / the soul and the body (you yourself as entire person, especially in relationship to this world) / *blamelessly* / at the return / of our Jesus Christ / be kept (be preserved from terrible condemnation).

(2) The explanation and translation of the text.

This text does not teach the division of man's nature into three parts. The words: spirit, soul and body do not represent three parts of the human nature. The personal pronoun you belongs to the first sentence. The word spirit (your invisible being in relationship to God) belongs to the second sentence. The words the soul and the body (your invisible and visible being in relationship to this world) belong to the third sentence. The pronoun "you" in the first sentence, the

noun “your spirit” in the second sentence and the nouns “the soul and the body” are parallel expressions (cf. parallelism in Luke 1:46-47).

The forward positions of “in every part” and “blameless” emphasise entirety.
The first adjective means “to the complete end” (wholly, through and through).
The second adjective means “in every part” (complete, sound, undamaged).
The third adverb means “without blame” (blamelessly)

Thus, the Greek text should be translated as follows:

“May the God of peace himself sanctify you *wholly*;
and may your spirit *in every part (be/ be preserved) complete*;
and may the soul and the body be kept *blamelessly* (from damnation) at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ”.

5. Understanding the words “soul”, “spirit” and “joints and marrow” in Hebrews 4:12.

(1) The literal Greek text and its literal translation.

Ζων γαρ ο λογος του θεου και ενεργης και τομωτερος υπερ πασαν μαχαιραν διστομον
For living / the word of God/ and / effective (active, powerful) / and / sharper (cutting) / than every double-edged sword

και δικνουμενος αχρι μερισμου ψυχης και πνευματος, αρμων τε και μυελων,
And / piercing / to / the dividing / of soul and spirit, / and / of both joints and marrow, /

και κριτικος ενθυμησεων και εννοιων καρδιας).
and / quick to discern or judge / the thoughts (reflections, ideas) / and / intents (insights, deliberations) / of the heart.

(2) The explanation and translation of the text.

This text does not teach the division of man’s nature into three parts. It is precarious to draw any conclusions about the author’s psychology from this text.

The accumulation of the four terms: *soul and spirit, joints and marrow* are to be understood as an expression of *the whole mental or spiritual nature of man in all aspects*. God’s Word probes *the inmost recesses of our spiritual being* and brings the subconscious motives to light. God will certainly do this on the last judgement day (Hebrews 4:13; 1 Corinthians 4:5).

Thus, the Greek text should be translated as follows:

“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword,
it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow;
able to discern or judge the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

6. Understanding the words “heart”, “soul”, “mind” and “strength” in Mark 12:30.

The words “heart” and “soul” and “mind” have each several different meanings in Greek. In general the heart (Greek: kardia) is the centre of man’s existence, the mainspring of all his thoughts, words and deeds (Proverbs 4:23); the soul (Greek: psuché) is the seat of man’s emotional activity; and the mind (Greek: dianoia) is the centre of his intellect, temperament and attitudes. The strength (Greek: ischus) is the power and energy of all his actions.

Also in this text we should not over-analyse. What is meant with these four words together is that Christians should love God with all the faculties with which God has endowed him.

7. The words “soul” and “spirit” in relationship to life and death.

In the Bible there is no clear distinction between the words “soul” and “spirit” any more. Both words have been used to describe the principle of life in man, his immaterial being, his invisible being or his spiritual being.

(1) The principle of life in man *before* death is represented
by either the word “soul” or the word “spirit”.

The Bible uses both words to describe the principle of life in man before his physical death.

Before his physical death, the principle of life of man within his mortal body is represented by either the word “soul” (Hebrew: nefesh, Greek: psuché, also translated “life”) or the word “spirit” (Hebrew: ruach, Greek: pneuma).

The word “soul” is used in Genesis 2:7; Psalm 31:9; 63:1; Matthew 6:25-27; 16:25-26; Revelation 18:13.

The word “spirit” is used in Job 34:14-15; Psalm 31:5; Ezekiel 36:26; Luke 8:55; Luke 23:46; Romans 8:10; 1 Corinthians 7:34; 2 Corinthians 7:1; James 2:26.

(2) The principle of life in man *after* death is represented
by either the word “soul” or the word “spirit”.

The Bible uses both words to describe the being and life of man after his physical death.

After his physical death, the being of man without his mortal physical body (that is, his incorporeal or disembodied being) is represented by either the word “soul” (Greek: psuché) or the word “spirit” (Hebrew: ruach, Greek: pneuma).

The word “soul” is used in Revelation 6:9; 20:4.

The word “spirit” is used in Ecclesiastes 12:7; Isaiah 26:14; Hebrews 12:23.

B. THE NATURE OF PHYSICAL DEATH

People have very different views about the nature of physical death.

1. God created man immortal.

Read Genesis 1:27; Ecclesiastes 3:11; Genesis 2:15-17.

Discover and discuss. What was the nature of man after he was created and *before* he fell into sin?

Notes. The first people, Adam and Eve, were not created *mortal*. They were created in the image of God, and this perfect condition seems to exclude decomposition and mortality. At creation, “God had set eternity in the hearts of man”. Both *their bodies and their souls* were created immortal.

But Genesis 1:26-27 does not imply that also all other things were created immortal. It only teaches that physical death of mankind was not a part of the original creation.

2. Physical death of man is God's punishment for sin.

Read Genesis 2:15-17; 3:17-19; John 5:28-29; Matthew 10:28; 25:46; Revelation 21:8.

Discover and discuss. What was the nature of man *after* he fell into sin?

Notes. Physical, spiritual and eternal death of mankind entered God's creation as God's punishment of sin. It is man who sins and therefore only man who dies as a punishment for sin!

After mankind fell into sin, their bodies have become mortal. When they die, their bodies will decompose and return to the dust. But although their bodies die, their spirits (or souls) do not die and cannot be killed.

After the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the bodies of all people, God will transform the bodies and spirits (or souls) of believers (Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:1-3), but destroy (Greek: *apollumi*) both the bodies and the spirits (or souls) of the unbelievers and the wicked people in hell. The word destroy cannot mean the annihilation of the bodies and spirits (or souls) of the wicked, because their destruction is described as an eternal punishment in hell (Matthew 25:46).

3. Only the physical death of man is something unnatural.

Read Psalm 90:7-11; Romans 1:32; 5:16; Galatians 3:13.

Discover and discuss. How is physical death of man viewed?

Notes. Some people view the death of man as something *natural*. These people generally do not believe in God or in the reality of sin (sin is to miss God's goal for your life) and also not in the eternity of a person's soul. Therefore, they think that death is just an unexplainable void or simply an end of all existence. Such people sometimes do not regard death as a terror.

Other people view the death of man as something *unnatural*. These people generally believe in God and that God has created man. However, they have different beliefs about the nature of man at creation and therefore also have different views about the nature of death.

Some people believe that man was created mortal. They say, because mankind sinned, he failed to rise to the height of immortality. Physical death is simply a continuation of mankind's original mortal condition.

Other people (Christians) believe that man was created immortal. They say, because mankind sinned, he lost the possibility to continue in immortality. Physical death is the punishment for his disobedience (Genesis 2:15-17). In the Bible, the physical death of man is not represented as something *natural* to man, but rather as an expression of *divine* anger (Psalm 90:7-11), as a judgement of God (Romans 1:32), a condemnation (rather: damnation)(Romans 5:16) and a curse (Galatians 3:13).

Genesis 2:17 addresses only the physical death of man and not the physical death of all other things. Genesis 1:29-30 speaks of plants being eaten and thus implies that the other living things on earth were not created immortal. Thus, while the death of man is something unnatural to God's creation, the death of all other living things (e.g. plants and trees, fish and birds, creeping things and animals) has never been unnatural in God's creation.

4. Physical death of man is delayed for a good reason.

Read Genesis 2:17; Acts 14:15-17; Romans 3:25-26; 2 Timothy 1:10; 2 Peter 3:7-9.

Discover and discuss. Why did God not immediately impose physical death on mankind after mankind fell into sin?

Notes. If God were only righteous and not love, he might have imposed physical death immediately on the first people after they fell into sin.

But because God is both righteous and gracious (love), he shows patience towards his creatures. By his common grace to all his creatures, he restrained and still restrains the operation of sin and death.

And by his special grace (love) in Jesus Christ, God brings life and immortality to light (John 10:28; 2 Timothy 1:10) and ultimately destroys death (1 Corinthians 15:50-56)! He does not want people to perish, but rather that they come to repentance (Ezekiel 33:11; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

All people who respond to the gospel by faith:

- already share in his victory over spiritual death
- will share in his victory over physical death of the body
- and over eternal death or destruction of the body and soul in hell!

5. Physical death of man is a return to the dust.

Read Genesis 2:7; 3:19.

Notes. The body of man was created from the “dust” (elements) of the earth. When a person dies, his present body is separated from his spirit (or soul) and is returned to the ground it came from, either by way of burial or cremation. “Man is dust and to dust he will return”.

6. Physical death of man is a complete separation from events on earth.

Read Psalm 49:10,17; Ecclesiastes 9:1-12; Isaiah 63:16; Luke 16:27-31; 1 Timothy 6:7.

Notes. A person in the state of death will never again have a part in anything that happens under the sun on this present earth. He cannot gather knowledge and he cannot plan or work on this present earth anymore. He has no more influence on this present earth! He does not know his family relations on earth and he cannot make any contact with them.¹

Physical death of man is a separation of the body and the spirit (or soul) of man, a separation from his beloved family and friends on earth, a separation from all his accomplishments and possession on earth, and a separation from all events happening on earth. While his body decays to dust in the grave, his spirit (or soul) will never again have a part in anything that happens on this present earth.

C. THE DEATH OF CHRISTIANS

Discover and discuss. If Christ suffered and died in the place of Christians, why must Christians still suffer and die?

1. The physical death of Christians is no longer a punishment.

Read Psalm 116:15; Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:56; Romans 3:23-26; 5:6-10; Hebrews 9:24-26.

Notes. For non-Christians, physical death is still a punishment for sin (Romans 6:23).

However, for Christians, physical death is no longer a punishment for sin, because the sacrifice of atonement of Christ on the cross has completely satisfied God’s righteous anger against their sins. Christ’s death on the cross demonstrated God’s just punishment of their sins (Isaiah 53:5-6; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18). Believers in Jesus Christ are certainly *justified*, that is, all their sins are forgiven and their physical death can no longer be regarded as the punishment for their sins. “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints” (Psalm 116:15).

2. The physical death of Christians is God's means to sanctify them.

Read Psalm 49:5-10,15-17; 89:47-48; Proverbs 14:12,27; 21:25; Romans 1:28-32; Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 4:7-11; Hebrews 4:15; 5:7-10; 1 Peter 4:12-14; 1 John 2:15-17.

Notes. The sufferings (through afflictions, sicknesses, setbacks, oppressions, persecutions) and physical death, which Christians still have to face, are God’s means of sanctifying them.

Although Jesus Christ never sinned, he certainly faced all kinds of human temptations and sufferings. For Jesus Christ, these trials and sufferings were the means to make his weakened human nature perfect (Hebrews 5:8-9).

Likewise, although Christians do sin, the various kinds of sufferings that they undergo, serve to humble their pride, to mortify their carnality, to check their worldliness and to foster their spiritual-mindedness. The Bible clearly teaches that the purpose of their sufferings on earth is that the new and holy life of Jesus Christ may be revealed in their bodies, now already on earth (2 Corinthians 4:7; 1 Peter 4:14) and later forever in heaven (Matthew 5:11-12).

3. The physical death of Christians is the completion of their sanctification and beginning of their perfect lives.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:50; Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 21:27.

Notes. Physical death is really the culmination and end of all the sufferings that Christians undergo on earth.

1 Corinthians 15:50 says, “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” The present bodies of Christians are still subjected to the sinful nature, to weakness and to physical death. The present bodies of Christians cannot inherit the kingdom of God in its final perfect state. That means that Christians cannot enter heaven now or the new earth later in their present mortal state.

¹ Spiritists and mediums who claim that they are able to contact the spirits of departed people, in reality make contact with demons (evil spirits) that are able to imitate people (1 Samuel 28; 2 Corinthians 11:14) and always tell lies (John 8:44)!

That is why the present bodies of Christians must first die and be transformed. Just as Christ entered his glory by way of his earthly sufferings and physical death, so Christians enter their eternal state only through their earthly sufferings and physical death! Their physical death on earth completes the sanctification of their spirits (or souls) so that they become “spirits of just men made perfect” (1 John 3:1-3; Hebrews 12:23). Physical death is not the end for Christians, but the beginning of their perfect life, first in heaven and later on the new earth! When a Christian dies he will immediately see Christ and be with Christ (Philippians 1:20-24; cf. Acts 7:54-60).

4. For Christians the fear of physical death has been replaced by the hope in the physical resurrection.

Read Luke 22:40-44; Acts 2:24; Hebrews 2:14-15.

Notes. The earthly sufferings and physical death, which Christians undergo, become their gateway to heaven.

By his death and resurrection from the dead, Christ has been *set free from his agony of death* (Luke 22:44; Acts 2:24).

Christ also *set Christians free from their slavery by their fear of death* (Hebrews 2:14-15). The fear of death has been replaced by their hope in the resurrection from the dead. And developing hope is a part of a Christian’s sanctification!

D. THE CONDITION OF MAN AFTER PHYSICAL DEATH

Discover and discuss. What happens to a person’s body and spirit (or soul) after he dies? Where does a person’s body go after death and where does his soul or spirit go? Do the souls or spirits of all people go the same place after death?

1. The being of man without his present body is eternal.

Read Ecclesiastes 3:11.

Notes. The Bible teaches that a person’s spirit (or soul) is eternal. His present physical body on earth is still temporal (dust), but will at the second coming of Christ be resurrected for ever.

2. The condition of an unrighteous person after physical death.

Read Matthew 25:46; Mark 9:42-48; Luke 16:22-23; 2 Peter 2:4-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10.

Notes. At the death of an unrighteous person, that is, a person who has not been made righteous by Jesus Christ, his spirit (or soul) is separated from his body and immediately thrown into hell. Luke 16:22-23 teaches that the unrighteous person immediately goes to hell where he will suffer torment. The apostle Peter teaches that their punishment is continued while they are kept for the day of judgement. Jesus and the apostle Paul teach that the unrighteous people are punished with everlasting destruction while they are shut out from the presence of the Lord.

3. The condition of a righteous person after physical death.

Read Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:21-23; Hebrews 12:22-24; Romans 8:35-39.

Notes. At the death of a righteous person, that is, a person who has been made righteous by Jesus Christ, his spirit (or soul) is separated from his body and immediately enters the presence of Jesus Christ. Luke 16:22 teaches that the beggar, who must have been righteous in God’s eyes, is immediately carried to the side of Abraham by angels. Luke 23:43 teaches that the repentant robber immediately enters paradise to be with Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:8 teaches that the Christian’s “absence from the body” means “being at home with the Lord”. Philippians 1:21-23 teaches that his “departure from earth” means “being with Christ”. And Hebrews 12:22-24 describes his existence in heaven as “coming to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly”; “to the church (Greek: *ekklésia*) of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven”; “to God, the judge of all men”; “to Jesus the Mediator of a new covenant”; ... and “to the *spirits* of righteous men made perfect”. Finally, Romans 8:35-39 teaches that physical death can never separate the Christian from God or God’s love for him!

4. The condition of the spirits of Christians in heaven.

Discover and discuss. What do the Christian spirits (or souls) experience and do in heaven?

Notes. During the interim period between the death and the resurrection of Christians, their bodies are in the grave on earth, while their spirits (or souls) are with God in heaven. Their spirits (or souls) are very *conscious and active* in heaven.

(1) Christians will see Christ’s glory.

Read John 14:1-4; 17:24.

Notes. When Christians die physically, their spirits (or souls) will be in the presence of Christ and see his glory, that is, behold and experience his love and mercy, his holiness, righteousness, kindness, wisdom, etc.

(2) Christians will rest.

Read Hebrews 4:9-11; Revelation 7:16-17; 14:13; 21:4.

Notes. Their spirits (or souls) will rest from the competition, toil, problems, worries, sickness, suffering, pain, fear, anguish, sin and sorrow present in their earthly lives. They will never suffer anymore.

(3) Christians will know.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:9-12.

Notes. Their imperfections will have disappeared and they will know fully everything they need to know.

(4) Christians will be filled with joy.

Read Psalm 16:11.

Notes. *They will be filled with joy* and with eternal pleasures in God's presence.

(5) Christians will sing.

Read Revelation 4:9-11; 5:11-14.

Notes. They will sing new songs to God and praise and worship God.

(6) Christians will serve.

Read Revelation 7:9-15.

Notes. *They will serve* God day and night. Like the angels, who also have no bodies, Christians will serve God in a great variety of meaningful work.

(7) Christians will reign.

Read Psalm 2:8-9; Revelation 2:26-27; 3:21.

Notes. Because they are with Christ in heaven, Christians share Christ's throne and triumphant victory over sin and death and over all human enemies and the devil. Making use of figurative speech, the Lord pictures the complete destruction of all opposition and all those who oppose Christ. Christians will share in Christ's triumph when they are with Christ in heaven before Christ's second coming.

At Christ's second coming to the earth Christians will come with Christ to judge the living and the dead (1 Thessalonians 4:14; Matthew 25:31-32). Therefore, Christians will also share in the accomplishment of Christ's final victory over all the wicked on earth (Matthew 13:41; Revelation 19:15-16) and they will share in his eternal glory! The enemies of Christ and of Christians will be defeated forever and never rise again!

After the second coming and on the new earth "the Twelve" apostles will also "sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:28-30). These two passages refer to the kingdom of God in its final perfect phase. "Judging" must be understood in the sense of reigning gloriously over, being resplendent above (Daniel 12:3; Matthew 13:43). The twelve tribes of Israel is here a term of the restored new Israel and could be a reference to either the elect gathered out of the twelve tribes of the Jews from the beginning to the end of the world's history (Romans 11:26), or it could even be a reference to all the chosen ones from both the Jews and the Gentiles from the beginning to the end of the world's history (Galatians 6:16). In either case, it must be a reference to those who are regenerated, because after the renewal of all things, nothing impure will ever enter the kingdom of God in its final form (Revelation 21:27).

The Bible does not give any more specifics about the experience and activities of Christians in heaven!

E. THE CONDITION OF MAN AFTER THE RESURRECTION

Discover and discuss. What happens to Christians after the resurrection of their bodies?

1. The condition of an unrighteous person after the physical resurrection.

Read Matthew 10:28; Revelation 21:8.

Notes. At the resurrection the bodies of the unrighteous dead will be reunited with their spirits (or souls). Angels will drive them before the judgement throne of Christ in the air (Matthew 24:40b, 41b) and their doom will be publicly announced (Matthew 25:41-46). After that they will be thrown with their body and spirit (soul) in hell (Matthew 10:28; Revelation 21:8).

2. The condition of a righteous person after the physical resurrection.

Read Philippians 3:20-21; Romans 4:17.

Notes. Until the second coming of Christ, the dust of their dead bodies will lie in their graves or will be scattered somewhere on earth. At the second coming of Christ, the dust of their former bodies will be resurrected and transformed so that they will become like Christ's glorious resurrected body! Jesus Christ, who created everything that is visible out of what was invisible (John 1:3; Hebrews 11:3), is able to resurrect and transform whatever belonged to their former physical bodies to become like his own resurrected body. Also their resurrected bodies will be reunited with their spirits (or souls) that will come with Christ from heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:14,16). Also their justification and commendation will be publicly announced at the final judgement in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17a; Matthew 25:31-40). And after the final judgement and renewal of the earth, they will descend with Christ onto the renewed earth and be with Christ forever on the new earth (1 Thessalonians 4:17b; Revelation 21:1-5).

3. The transformed bodies of resurrected Christians will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual and immortal bodies.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-44,53-54; Philippians 3:21.

Notes. Making use of biblical symbolism, Paul teaches that believers go down in death as a grain sown in the earth, from which springs a new and more abundant and more glorious life. The natural body of man is “flesh and blood”, perishable, without grace and weak, but the resurrected body of Christians will be “imperishable, glorious, strong and spiritual”!

The resurrected bodies of Christians will be

- *imperishable*, that is, will never grow old, sick or weak and will never die
- *glorious*, that is, share in the divine characteristics like love, holiness, righteousness, power and wisdom of God.
- raised in *power*, that is, receive power to live the transformed life forever!
- *spiritual*, that is, completely renewed and governed by the Holy Spirit.
- *immortal*, that is, they will exist forever in a perfect life, in everlasting blessedness and in the presence of God!

In short, at their resurrection their lowly bodies will be transformed to be like Christ’s glorious body, which was no longer subject to the physical laws of this present earth (John 20:6-9,19,26; Luke 24:21; Acts 1:9; Revelation 21:4).

F. QUESTIONS CHRISTIANS OFTEN ASK

1. Should Christians honour the dead? Should the death of beloved family members be commemorated?

“Venerate (worship): no! “Honour”: yes! This question is answered in manual 6, supplement 8.

2. Will Christians be able to recognise one another in heaven?

According to Luke 16:9, the *friends* that Christians had made through their worldly wealth on earth, would welcome them into the eternal dwellings of heaven!

According to Luke 16:19-31, there was recognition and communication in heaven.

Matthew 8:11 describes the joy of heaven with the symbolical picture of a banquet. Therefore, the expectation of seeing one another again and having joyful fellowship with one another in heaven is completely biblical as long as it remains subordinate to fellowship with Christ.

3. If Christians will actually recognise people in heaven, will they not miss those loved family members and friends they had on earth and who had not become Christians?

According to Matthew 12:46-50, all kinds of relationships on earth that were not “in Christ” will lose their meaning in heaven. We may therefore expect that once we get into heaven, we will not remember anything about our former family members and friends who were not Christians.

G. THE CHRISTIAN FUNERAL SERVICE

1. The sorrow of losing a beloved in death.

(1) Give room to express grief.

When a beloved person dies, there is always much sorrow and tears. The Christian hope of the resurrection of the dead does not have to exclude the mourning for the loss of a beloved. Jesus cried when his friend Lazarus died. Christians should give ample room for the expression of grief.

(2) Help others in their process of grief.

And Christians should help their fellow-Christians, who have lost a beloved, in their process of grieving. They have four tasks: They need to help them to:

- accept the reality of their loss.
- experience the pain caused by their loss.
- adjust to the situation of living without the departed person.
- loosen their emotional bond with the departed person by re-investing in new relationships and goals in life.

This process of grieving may take years!

2. The method of the Christian funeral.

(1) Burial or cremation.

The Bible does not prescribe what Christians should do with the bodies of the dead when they die. The issue of cremation is controversial. Some Christians believe that, because the Bible speaks of the resurrection of the body, the body should be buried and not be destroyed by cremation. Other Christians believe that, while the body will certainly be destroyed and return to the dust either by way of burial, or cremation or loss in disasters (Genesis 3:19; Revelation 20:13), Christians are free to decide if they want to be buried or cremated. They believe that God, who created the original body of a person from the dust or elements of the earth (Genesis 2:7), will also resurrect the dust or elements of that body after it had died (Hebrews 11:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). Nevertheless, some Christians have strong reservations against cremation.

(2) The funeral ceremony.

The Bible also does not prescribe how Christians should be buried or cremated. However, the Bible clearly teaches why there is death in the world, where people go after death, and what will happen at the resurrection of the bodies and the final judgement at the second coming of Jesus Christ. Therefore, what the Bible teaches about the funeral service is not how Christians should bury their dead, but what they could preach at the funeral service! At Christian funeral services, preachers could preach the gospel and teach these important Bible truths to the people who are present.

3. The preaching at the Christian funeral service.

Christians could preach several different messages during funeral services. Here are four possibilities:

(1) Christians could proclaim the gospel.

Because there will always be non-Christians present at funerals, preachers could proclaim the Good News about Christ.

(2) Christians could preach about the problem of sin and death.

Read Romans 6:23; Hebrews 9:27; Romans 5:8-11; 2 Timothy 1:10; 1 Corinthians 4:7-10.

God must punish sin with death. God brought death into the universe as a punishment. Because God is holy and righteous, he must punish sin with death.

But who can solve the problem of death? Science cannot solve the problem of death. No religion or magic can solve the problem of death. The Bible says that only God (Christ) can solve the problem of death. Jesus says: "I AM the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25)!

God also brought eternal life and immortality to light through (the preaching of) the gospel. In his great mercy and love for people, God gave himself in Jesus Christ to die on the cross *in the place of* those who believe. God solved the problem of sin and the problem of sin and death through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ. Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ has been justified and will be saved from God's wrath at the final judgement.

God uses suffering and death as a means of sanctification. Christians do not undergo physical sufferings and death as a punishment anymore, but as a means of sanctification (to set them for ever apart to God) and as a gateway to heaven.

(3) Christians could preach about Christ experiencing the punishment of death in their place.

Read Hebrews 7:26-27; 10:1-4; Romans 3:21-26; John 5:24.

Throughout history, people have felt guilty and ashamed of their sins and have brought animal sacrifices to God. But, the animals are not people, are not perfect and do not die voluntarily. Therefore animal sacrifices can never save people from their sins. In spite of their sacrifices, people continue to feel guilty and continue to feel ashamed of their sin.

However, Jesus Christ was a human being, perfectly sinless and willing to die on the cross in the place of everyone who believes in him! Jesus Christ experienced the punishment of death in the place of believers. He is the only perfect sacrifice for our sins. The righteous anger and punishment of God against the sins of believers have been placed on Jesus and have thus been removed from believers. Everyone, who believes in Jesus Christ, will never be condemned (doomed) anymore! He will no longer regard physical death as a punishment for sin, but as the beginning of his perfect life with Christ in heaven.

(4) Christians could preach about Christ experiencing the terror of death in their place.

Read Matthew 27:46; Acts 2:22-24; Hebrews 2:9,14-15.

Christ suffered the agony of death instead of Christians. By God's grace he tasted death instead of Christians. He experienced the agony and terror to be forsaken by God instead of Christians. Therefore, everyone who believes in Jesus Christ is set free from the power of death and is set free from the slavery by their fear of death! Christians, who believe the truth of the Bible, will no more experience this agony, bitterness and terror, which death has for all people, because Jesus Christ experienced these in their place!

(5) Christians could preach about the eternal destiny of man.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3; Matthew 25:31-34,41,46; Luke 4:19; 2 Corinthians 6:2.

The eternal destiny of man is determined by his relationship to Jesus Christ while he is still living on earth! After a person's physical death, there will never be another chance for him to be saved anymore!

The suddenness of Christ's second coming, the swiftness of the resurrection from the dead and the immediate final judgement means that there will be no opportunity for conversion when these events take place. Then it would be too late! Your relationship to Jesus Christ and how you live on earth with him and for him *before* your physical death is absolutely decisive how you will be judged!

At *his first coming*, Jesus Christ came to save many people! "The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him (John 3:17). It is now still "the time of God's favour" (Isaiah 61:1-2a)!

But at *his second coming*, he does not come to convert people, but to judge people (cf. Matthew 3:11-12)! Therefore, the preacher should preach the gospel at the funeral service and challenge the still living relatives and other people to

accept Christ as Saviour! 2 Corinthians 6:2 says, “Now is the time of God’s favour, now is the day of salvation!” Now, while you are still alive and before the second coming of Jesus Christ, is the time you can still be saved! Therefore, if you have not yet received Christ, you should pray and receive him into your heart and life *now*! (John 1:12; Revelation 3:20).

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	<i>[REACTIONS]</i> PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD’S WORD
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Take turns in the group to pray short to God in response to what you have learned today.
Or divide the group into two’s or three’s and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	<i>[ASSIGNMENT]</i> FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples and build Christ’s Church.
2. Preach, teach or study the teaching of “Christian funeral” together with another person or group of people.
3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time from half a chapter of 1 Timothy 1 - 4 each day.
Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. Meditate and memorise the new Bible verse. (9) John 8:12. Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. Bible study. Prepare the next Bible study at home. John 9. Make use of the five steps method of Bible study.
6. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. Update your notebook on building Christ’s Church. Include your notes on personal time with God, your memorisation notes, your teaching notes and this preparation.