

“Strayed Concerning The Truth”

Introduction. There have been some strange ideas about leaving this world. The ancient Egyptians buried their dead with material goods for the next life. Jim Jones and 900 of his followers committed mass suicide in Jonestown in 1978. The Heaven’s Gate Cult committed mass suicide in a California mansion in 1997. Jack (“Dr. Death”) Kevorkian pioneered doctor-assisted suicide for “relief with dignity.” The Atheist/ Humanist believes that you’re dead with no existence in the afterlife, and the Christian Scientist believes that death is an illusion.

In 2 Timothy 2:17-18, the word or teaching of Hymaneus and Philetus is said to “spread like cancer.” Concerning the truth, they have erred and have overthrown (“destroyed” or “ruined”) not only their faith, but the faith of others.

You need to know the major false doctrines regarding leaving this world and see how so many have “strayed concerning the truth.”

I. Some False Doctrines About Leaving This World

A. Purgatory.

1. The Roman Catholic Church supports a supposed place or condition of temporal punishment where saints go to burn away their sins because they are not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions. This provides the saint with a “second chance” after death and not be cast off eternally from God.
2. Scriptures used to support the doctrine of Purgatory:
 - a) Matthew 12:32.
 - b) 1 Corinthians 3:11-15.

B. Rapture.

1. The Premillennialist believes that at a secret coming of Christ, all the dead saints will be resurrected, and along with the living saints, will be raptured into heaven for a period of seven years while the “great tribulation” takes place on earth. Then, Christ will appear with His church (having been safely raptured) to commence His 1,000 year reign on the earth from Jerusalem.
2. Specific requirements for the Rapture:
 - a) Jesus coming for His saints (1 Thessalonians 3:13).
 - b) Two resurrections separated by 1,007 years (John 5:28-29; Matthew 25:31-46).
 - c) A secret or quiet coming (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

C. Godhood.

1. Mormons state, “As man is, God once was: as God is, man may become.” “God exists and we had better strive to become one with them ... a plurality of gods exist.” “The spirit children would be sent to take on mortal bodies and learn good from evil.” “The Lord created you and me for the purpose of becoming gods like himself.” “Perhaps one doctrine that most distinguishes the Latter Day Saints from other denominations is the conviction that all worthy men and women can become gods and goddesses.”

2. The New Testament never teaches about the elevation of mortal man to the position of a god after death.
- D. Annihilation.
1. The Jehovah's Witnesses say, "Man is wholly mortal and the wicked absolutely cease to exist at death." "Man is not created immortal, but the righteous will be granted immortality for eternity with God at the resurrection, while the wicked will be raised with a conditional immortality to suffer a time of punishment commensurate with their wickedness, after which they will be annihilated."
 2. Two necessary definitions:
 - a) To the annihilationist, hell must become a cessation of existence rather than eternal torment at death (Mark 9:43-48).
 - b) Also, man's "body and soul" must equal only "dust and breath" (Genesis 1:26; Ecclesiastes 12:6-7, 13-14).
 3. Why "annihilation" is appealing to some:
 - a) No consequences of sin.
 - b) No accountability to a higher authority.
 - c) No God-given code of conduct.
 - d) No eternal hell of unending torment.
- E. Reincarnation.
1. This theory postulates that a soul is incarnated successively into different bodies. Several groups, including Hindus and Buddhists, believe in this false doctrine.
 - a) Beliefs may differ, but the basic, common ground is the same.
 - b) The goal is merging with the "great soul of the universe."
 - c) "Karma" (action, doing) determines the state of the next life.
 2. New Age thought or westernized reincarnation is a blending of diverse, often bizarre "world religions." This is merely reincarnation conditioned by sophisticated, western thought and was popularized by Shirley MacLaine's 1983 book, *Out On A Limb*. The proposed mechanism by which this works is that each eternal soul breaks off from God at some point, and is striving to return and be reabsorbed into God.
 3. The perceived value and purpose of reincarnation is that it is able to deal with seemingly impossible or difficult problems:
 - a) Injustice and God's justice and love.
 - b) Destiny — "Where did I come from? Where am I going?"
 - c) Child prodigies.
 - d) Retrocognition — "I have never been here, but I know this place!"
 4. Supposed Bible support:
 - a) John was Elijah (Matthew 11:8-14).
 - b) "Bad" karma (John 9:1-3).
 - c) Punishment in future lives for present sins (Exodus 20:5).
 - d) Perfection or "Godness" for all men, eventually (Matthew 5:48).
 - e) Rebirth means reincarnation (John 3:3).
 - f) Teaching the Law of Karma (Galatians 6:7).

II. Old Testament Teaching Of Life After Death

- A. The Hebrew *sheol* was used in the Old Testament to describe the unseen realm.
 - 1. It is translated as “grave,” “hell,” “Sheol,” or “the pit.”
 - 2. One definition says it was a place where one was “gathered to his people,” or was said “to go to one’s fathers” (Genesis 15:15; 25:8, 17).
 - 3. Here the dead were conscious and retained their identity (Isaiah 14:9).
 - 4. Recall that Samuel could be summoned from the dead (1 Samuel 28:8-19).
 - 5. God was aware of what went on there, and His presence was felt there (Job 26:6; Psalm 139:8).
- B. They viewed Sheol as only a temporary dwelling place of departed spirits.
 - 1. They longed to be delivered from the grave, and be in God’s presence (Job 14:7-15; 19:25-27; Psalm 16:10-11; 49:13-15).
 - 2. While they believed they would be united with loved ones there, they also believed that God’s wrath burned to the depths of Sheol (Deuteronomy 32:22; 2 Samuel 12:23).
- C. Some questions are settled by the end of the Old Testament.
 - 1. Saul’s desire to speak to Samuel shows the belief the dead are still “alive.”
 - 2. The faithful were in a “good place,” and the wicked were in a different place.
 - 3. Those in the grave retained their identity.
 - 4. The New Testament verified their longing for an eternal residence (Hebrews 11:13-16).

III. New Testament Teaching Of Life After Death

- A. Five different terms are used to describe the realms of those in the grave.
 - 1. The Greek word *hades*, used in the Septuagint as the equivalent of *sheol*, is most often used to describe the place of the dead (Psalm 16:8-11; Acts 2:25-28).
 - 2. *Paradise*, a Persian word for a royal park, was used by Jesus, Paul, and John (Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 12:2-4; Revelation 2:7).
 - 3. *Heaven* was used to describe the atmosphere around the earth, the space beyond the earth, and the invisible realm where God dwells (Matthew 6:26; 24:29; John 3:13, 31; 2 Corinthians 12:2; Hebrews 8:1).
 - 4. The Greek word *tartarus* was used once to describe the place where sinful angels are held until they are judged (2 Peter 2:4).
 - 5. The Greek word *gehenna*, named after the Valley of Hinnom where the Jews burned their children in worship to idols and translated “hell,” describes the final, eternal place of the wicked (Matthew 10:28; 25:41; Mark 9:43-47).
- B. The New Testament describes both an intermediate and a permanent place of the soul.
 - 1. The hope for victory over the grave was assured by Christ’s resurrection, and will be realized in our resurrection from the grave (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).
 - 2. Tartarus may well be a separate place from Hades, but the fate of wicked angels and lost humanity is the same (Matthew 25:41).
 - 3. Hades is only a temporary dwelling place of the soul, while Gehenna was a permanent place where the wicked were sent.

- C. In Luke 16:19-31, the Lord gives us a glimpse of life beyond the grave.
1. Those who deny the immortal spirit of man say that this is only a parable. While it bears none of the marks of a parable, the truth it teaches is still true.
 2. Really notice what we learn from Jesus in this story:
 - a) After death, the good and evil are both in a place called Hades which is separated into two parts, one called Abraham's bosom and the other one is a place of torment (vv. 22-23).
 - b) Jesus referred to the place of rest for the righteous as Paradise (Luke 23:43; Acts 2:27).
 - c) After death, conscious existence continues (vv. 24-25).
 - d) People retain their identities and memories of life (v. 25; 1 John 3:2).
 - e) There is no change of status after death (v. 26).
 - f) The dead can no longer affect the affairs of those still alive (vv. 27-31).

Conclusion. Too often man is not satisfied with God's revealed will. Dissatisfaction leads to efforts to correct or change what God has said. But comparison with the Bible, as the standard of truth, will always show whether man's thoughts and ideas are right with God or if man has "strayed concerning the truth" (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; John 14:6; Hebrews 9:27-28). A Christian has a living hope of heaven (1 Peter 1:3-4). How will He find you when He comes?