

What Assured Hope Can We Have Beyond The Grave?

It has been said there are two things that we can be sure of in life; death and taxes.

Taxes is something I cannot help you avoid, but eternal death I can.

Science, particularly medical science, offers us many ways to improve and extend life, but we all know that its power is limited; in the end we all face death.

Death has been called "*the great equaliser*".

No-one has power over the day of his death.

We may surround ourselves with many physical possessions that bring us a certain joy and fulfilment, but in the back of our mind is the nagging thought that "*we can't take them with us*"!!

All the physical things for which we have laboured hard, will eventually become the possessions of others who will **not** have laboured to receive them.

Ecclesiastes 2:18-19 [NIV] "*I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless.*"

When a dear friend or loved one dies, we feel we have lost part of ourselves, and it is natural for us to mourn that loss and just as natural to seek comfort at such a time.

But where can we go to seek real satisfying comfort to relieve the pain we feel deep inside our consciousness?

Science is silent; it has no convincing answers.

To medical science, death marks a failure.

There is only one true source where we can find convincing answers to our questions about death and any existence beyond the grave.

This source is a book that has been ignored by the vast majority of mankind and, by those who are aware of its existence, has been looked on as difficult to read and has been called "*the most misunderstood book ever written.*"

Most likely, you have a copy gathering dust somewhere in your home.

It is called The Christian Bible, the God-given **Handbook for Life**.

The Christian Bible is inspired by The One who created life and also created death.

What is revealed in its pages has to be taken in faith because only the author has faced death, died and been resurrected back to never-ending life of a far superior kind than any human being has ever experienced.

The Good News is that such a never-ending, superior life is available to all mankind under certain conditions.

Such understanding can really give us deep, long-lasting comfort as we face our own inevitable death or that of a loved one.

1 Corinthians 15:26 [NIV] *“The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”*

Long ago, one of the God-inspired writers of The Christian Bible, His **Handbook for Life**, the Apostle Paul, appropriately called death *“the last enemy to be destroyed.”*

Paul was given great insight into human life, death, and what happens after death.

That can be a great source of encouragement and comfort.

The Good News is that there is hope; God the creator of all life, has worked out a plan to rescue us all from our inevitable fate, death.

The Christian Bible, God’s **Handbook for Life**, reveals the answers to the most fundamental questions you can ask about death; and what it reveals about the possibility of life after death is supremely hopeful and inspiring.

The death spoken of in The Christian Bible, God’s **Handbook for Life**, marks a complete shut-down of our conscious mind and brings an end to us as thinking, aware beings.

Ecclesiastes 9:3-6 *“This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun. The same destiny overtakes all the hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil [affliction, calamity, sorrow or trouble] and there is madness [boasting and foolishness] in their hearts while they live, and afterwards they join the dead. Anyone who is among the living has hope, even a live dog is better off than a dead lion! **For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward** [for their labour] **and even the memory of them is forgotten** [eventually]. Their love, their hate, and their jealousy have long since vanished: never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.”*

There is a very good reason for what seems this finality of death.

God, our Creator, in His Great Love, could **not allow** weak, fallible human beings to live for ever in a body often full of pain and discomfort.

A body always very limited, constantly unable to accomplish the desires of the wonderful mind that God has given us, and always without any hope of a change to this limitation.

So God made us mortal, subject to death, so He could give immortal life and a far less limited spirit body **to those who will not abuse it!!**

1 Corinthians 15:50, 53-54 *“I declare to you, brothers, that **flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom** [domain] **of God**, [i.e. the eternal spirit world] **nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable**. For the perishable [our present human body] **must clothe itself with the imperishable, and this mortal with immortality**. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with the immortality, then the saying that is written will come true ‘death has been swallowed up in victory.’”*

Human mortality [our being subject to death] exists as the consequence of what The Christian Bible, God’s **Handbook for Life**, calls sin.

The Bible defines sin as lawlessness, a violation of God’s Law [the way He conducts His Life] which is summed up in one word, *“Love”*.

What this society calls *“love”* is more often what should be called *“lust”*.

The Christian Bible, God's **Handbook for Life**, clearly separates "lust" from "love", what society often calls love is defined in:-

1 John 2:15-17 *"Do not love the world or anything in the world". [Society and the way society acts or responds]. "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of the eyes, and the boasting of what he has or does, comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the Will of God lives for ever.*

There are in these verses two Greek words both translated "love" in the English but with differing meaning.

"Love of the world" ["agapaō"] to regard with favour, "love of the Father" [agapé] spontaneous love irrespective of the rights or response of recipient.

Real "love" is shown by certain basic principles referred to in:-

John 15:12-13 *"My command is this: love [agapaō] each other as I have loved [agapaō] you. Greater love [agapé] has no-one than this, that he lay down his life [time and talents] for his friends."* We find this same "love" [agapé] expounded in:-

1 Corinthians 13:4-8, 13 *"Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes [for the best in others], always preserves. Love never fails."*

From God's perspective, we all have been living lawlessly because we have missed the mark of perfect love [agapé] for our Creator God and our fellow human beings.

Matthew 22:35-40 *"One of them, an expert in the law, tested Him [Jesus] with this question 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?' Jesus replied, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart [thoughts and feelings] and with all your soul [breath that gives us life] and with all your mind [intellect].' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it, 'Love your neighbour as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.'"*

Humanity has cut itself off from his Creator God through this disobedience, often without realising what has happened.

Isaiah 59:1-2 *"Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor His ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities [perverseness, persistence, movement away from what is reasonably required] have separated you from your [creator] God; your sins [habitual offences] have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear."*

Not that God desired this to happen, yet out of this self-made condition from which we cannot free ourselves by our own power comes the hope of God-given life after death.

2 Peter 3:9 *"The Lord is not slow in keeping His Promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you and not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance [reversal of our decisions – to reconsider and begin to think differently]."*

How is this accomplished?

By a re-birth!!

John 3:5-6 *"Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born [again] of water and the spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the [Holy] spirit gives birth to the spirit."*

We are born again of water through baptism after repentance and born again of spirit through the receiving of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

This is what is referred to in God's Word, His **Handbook for Life**, as "*salvation*"; being saved from eternal death.

Having been cut off from God by our sins, we need a mediator to speak on our behalf to God the Father.

1 Timothy 2:5 *"For there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus the Christ."*

Apart from Jesus Christ, death is the supreme enemy of humanity, but our Creator God anticipated this helpless situation of humans.

Romans 5:6 *"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Jesus the Christ died for the ungodly."*

Romans 5:10 *"For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son [Jesus the Christ], how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His Life!"*

This is a promise from the great Creator God for *all* humanity.

John 3:16-17 *"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son [Jesus the Christ] that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world [all humanity] through Him."*

Our Creator God has offered us two choices, very simply stated:

- 1 Repent and believe that Jesus the Christ can save us from eternal death;
- 2 Ignore what God offers and remain in the dark about what follows physical death.

John 3:18-21 *"Whoever believes in Him [Jesus the Christ] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men love darkness instead of light because their needs were evil [hurtful – malicious and degenerate]. Everyone who does evil [flawed – imperfect – blemished] hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."*

No-one likes to admit their mistakes or to have their mistakes exposed to the light.

This takes courage and conviction on the part of the person involved.

But we need to remember three things:-

1. God already knows all the sins [mistakes] we have made in our lives.

Psalms 139:1-4 *"O Lord, you have searched me and you know me, you know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely."*

Although God knows all our past sins, He will **not** expose them to others **if** we repent of them because of the Great Love for us.

Proverbs 10:12 “... Love covers all wrongs.”

Proverbs 17:9 “He who covers over an offence promotes love....”

God wants us to come to love Him.

1 Peter 4:8 “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins.”

2. Our repentance is towards God and between Him and us alone.

Acts 20:21 “I have declared to both Jews and Greeks [Jews and non-Jews, hence all humanity] that they **must turn to God in repentance** and have faith in our Lord Jesus.”

Romans 2:4 “Do you show contempt for the riches of His [God’s] kindness, tolerance and patience, not realising that **God’s kindness leads you to repentance?**”

Ask God and He will help you to come to a state of repentance.

Isaiah 1:16-17 “..... stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the cause of the widow.”

All the above are contrary to the natural responses of our human nature, but God wants us to show we have an earnest desire to change, then He wants us to talk to Him about our past.

Isaiah 1:18 “Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet [a very fast dye that would not wash out – i.e. deeply embedded in our nature due to repetition] they shall be as white as snow.”

3. Only by accepting the death of Jesus the Christ in our stead can we avoid the death our sins have earned us and receive eternal life as a gift from God.

Throughout The Christian Bible, God’s **Handbook for Life**, we see emphasised that the final outcome of our sin is eternal death.

Ezekiel 18:4 “The soul who sins is the one who will die.”

James 1:15 “..... sin when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”

That is the bad news.

John 3:16-17 [NIV] “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, **that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

When Jesus became identified with our sin, it was inevitable that He should also experience death which is the outcome of sin.

Hebrews 2:9 “But we see **Jesus**, who was made a little lower than the angels, [human so He could die] now crowned with glory and honour [after His resurrection] because He suffered death, so that by the Grace of God **He might taste death for everyone.**”

Jesus bore the sin of all humanity, and so died the death due to all humanity.

Now all who in faith accept His substitutionary sacrifice are offered the gift of eternal life by the indwelling of Holy Spirit in us.

Romans 6:23 *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

John 11:25-26 Jesus said *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies [a physical death, or a symbolic death in baptism] and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die [eternally]. Do you believe this?”*

Christ made this statement to Martha just before He illustrated His power over death by restoring life to her brother, Lazarus.

Note: *“Lives”* as well as *“believes”*, on acceptance of Christ’s Death in our stead, **we then have to begin living a new life.**

Romans 6:1-3 *“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin [by accepting the sacrifice of Christ]. How can we live in it [sin] any longer or don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death?”*

Baptism shows outwardly that we identify with Christ’s death in our stead and is commanded by scripture.

Acts 2:38-39 *“Repent and be baptised, every one of you. In the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off [in time or distance] for all whom the Lord our God will call.”*

The final command given by Jesus to those who were to continue the work He started is recorded in:-

Matthew 28:18-20 *“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples [students] of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.’”*

Romans 6:4-6 *“We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the Glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with Him like this in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection; for we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.”*

The word translated *“sin”* in this passage of scripture means *“failing to hit the mark”*.

This may be by doing something wrong and hurtful or failing to do something good when the opportunity is made available to us.

There will be times when we do fail in this way but as long as we are not slavishly failing all the time the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf will cover these mishaps.

Romans 6:7-10 *“Because anyone who has died has been freed from sin [the penalty of sin – death – is the ultimate power the law has over us, once we die the law cannot reach us]. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, He cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over Him. The death He died, He died to [do away with] sin once for all; but the life He lives, He lives to God.”*

Once we accept the death of Jesus the Christ in our stead we will **not** die eternally.

But continuing to follow the example of Christ we must now, in response to what Christ has done for us, live our lives in serving God, *“lives to God”*.

Romans 6:11-13 *“In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Jesus Christ. Therefore [as a result of what God has done for us] do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness.”*

“Parts of your body” – every part of our body, our mind, skills, eyes, ears, hands, feet, etc., etc., not just part of the time but as a bond slave all of the time.

Romans 6:13 *“But offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness.”*

Romans 6:16- *“Don’t you know that when you offer yourself to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey, whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience [to God], which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you whole-heartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted [God’s revealed Word, The Christian Bible]. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.”*

The way we resist **sinning**, missing the mark, that is **missing the purpose for God giving us life**; is to totally offer all of our life to serving the Creator God who gave us physical life and can give us, as a gift, eternal life.

Job 14:14-17 *“If a man dies, will he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait for my renewal [by a resurrection to a new being] to come. You will call [most likely from physical death in our grave] and I will answer you [new life implied by our being able to converse again after the silence of death in the grave]. You will long for the creature your hands have made.”*

Job knew the Power of God had to resurrect him after death.

He also knew that God as a Master Potter desires the work of his hands.

While in our present physical state God desires to mould us into a loving, caring, faithful person like Himself.

Isaiah 64:8 *“Yet, O Lord, you are our Father [the one who gives us life]. We are the clay, you are the potter, we are the work of your hands.”*

Matthew 25:31-34 *“When the Son of Man [another title given to Jesus portraying one of His offices] comes in all His Glory, and the angels with Him, [referring to Jesus the Christ’s Second Coming, this time in power to rule not die for our sins], He will sit on His Throne in Heavenly Glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. Then the King [Jesus on His Throne] will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world’.”*

This scripture is looking forward in time to the Second Coming of Jesus the Christ and the giving of rewards to those who are using this life of trials and pains to prepare for a far more glorious life after the death of this mortal body.

Matthew 25:35-36 *“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”*

These verses show **our part** in the moulding that God the Master Potter is doing, our showing an outward, loving concern for the welfare of others.

Revelation 21:1-7 *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming*

down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His People, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' He said to me, 'It is done. I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.'

A wonderful picture of a future that God has for us, when all who mourn today will be re-united with their loved ones.

Take comfort from these words of truth, directly taken from *The Word of God, His only Handbook for Life, which cannot fail.*

There is assured hope beyond the grave for all who are willing to believe God and surrender their lives to Him to mould day by day into the types of people we, as well as God, would like to share eternity with.

The other alternative is then shown us in the verse that follows the description of the “*wonderful world tomorrow*” we have just read.

Revelation 21:8 *“But to the cowardly, the unbeliever, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practise magic arts, the idolaters and all liars, their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.”*

To help you believe God, know His Will for you, and surrender to Him in preparation to inherit this wonderful world tomorrow, there are other people in your area who are on this journey.

They are called Christians.

I encourage you to contact a Christian church near to you that uses God’s Word, the Christian Bible, God’s **Handbook for Life**, as the “*yard stick*” as to judge how we should conduct our lives.

I can assure you that you will never regret such a decision.