

A Better Hope **Ecclesiastes 3:11**

Introduction

A belief in life after death is virtually a universal belief among humans. Skepticism about the afterlife has only emerged in very recent history, and even with its continuing influence, more than 80% of Americans still believe in life after death.

The Bible says it is there because God put it there. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, "He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end." ([Ecclesiastes 3:11 NKJV](#))

Every person instinctively senses they will go on living, but we cannot understand more than this apart from God's revelation. Only God can explain the eternal spiritual longings He has put into our hearts.

God has put this sense in our hearts because he wants to satisfy it. The Bible provides a much better hope than anything our human minds could imagine.

It is a better hope for several reasons. First of all, the Bible gives us far more information about the future than any other religion or "scripture." In fact, there is so much detail that it is difficult to collate. God knows about the longing for eternity that he set in our hearts. He knows our anguish over death and our concern for the loved ones we have lost.

God wants us to know His plan for our eternal life. The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2, "But as it is written: "EYE HAS NOT SEEN, NOR EAR HEARD, NOR HAVE ENTERED INTO THE HEART OF MAN THE THINGS WHICH GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM." But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God." ([1 Corinthians 2:9-10 NKJV](#))

I. God Promises Us A Better Future

The Bible describes a far better afterlife than any other view. In the next life, God wants to give us more than just relief from the negatives of this life and far more than merely the continuation of this life. Paul says it is much better than this life.

It is so unimaginably wonderful in a positive sense that it far exceeds the limits of human language to describe it. In 2 Corinthians 2, he writes, "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." ([2 Corinthians 12:2-4 NKJV](#))

In 2 Corinthians 4, he writes, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17 NKJV)

For this reason, scripture sometimes employs symbolic language, a fact we must bear in mind lest we interpret biblical descriptions of the next life in crassly literalistic ways.

Above all, the next life will be personal. God is a community of Persons who love one another, and we have been created in God's image. God created us to enjoy perfect relationships forever--most of all with God, but also with other humans and angelic beings.

God's plan is very different from the afterlife envisioned by the animism practices of Native Americans or the Shinto religion practiced by the Japanese, which incorporated the worship of ancestors and natural spirits they believed had sacred powers. Animism is a belief that humans continue to exist consciously—but as disembodied spirits after death. They become the ancestral spirits who affect their living relatives for good or ill, depending on a variety of factors. That is why ancestor worship is so important in many animistic religions.

The afterlife in the pantheism of Hinduism or Buddhism is much different. Pantheists believe at death; people are reincarnated according to karmic law. According to Karma, God is not a Person but is ultimate oneness, and the fate that awaits all of us is the loss of all personhood and absorption into the impersonal oneness of the universe. At death, you become like a drop of water into the sea. A real merging of the limited into the ocean of universal life involving complete surrender of separative existence in all its forms. Pantheism is a sphere (called nirvana) which is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor air. It is the sphere of nothingness—the end of suffering.

The Bible reveals many things about the next life which corrects many myths you may have heard. According to scripture, the next life will provide a complete joy and satisfaction of every wholesome human aspiration. And it's not just a classic case of wishful thinking. God has provided better evidence for an eternal future with Him than there is for any other view.

God promises us a better future than we could ever hope for.

II. God Supplies Better Evidence

God supplies better evidence for His eternal future than any other view of the afterlife.

As we study the afterlife, we need to understand a couple of important distinctions. First, we need to understand the difference between empirical certainty and sufficient evidence. Empirical certainty refers to scientific proof of something that is accessible to our five senses through repeated laboratory examination. Obviously,

then, there is no empirical certainty of the afterlife--it requires a step of faith. But that doesn't mean that every belief about the afterlife is equally plausible or implausible because some beliefs have more evidence for them than others.

Let's say you need a heart surgery. There is no way you can have empirical certainty about the outcome. That means you'll have to trust someone to perform the surgery. But that doesn't mean that just any choice of trust is equally plausible. You wouldn't pick a name randomly or ask your carpenter neighbor to do it. You would examine the evidence available to you for the best choice of a surgeon. You would investigate only heart surgeons, ask for references, and get recommendations before you decide to trust a particular surgeon. There is a definite difference between blind faith and evidence-based faith. The choice to trust just anyone to operate on you would be a step of blind faith. Trusting the heart surgeon with the best references and credentials would be a step of evidence-based faith.

In the same way, not all views of the afterlife have the same evidential credentials. In fact, no other view comes close to the amount of credible evidence that Christianity provides. The Bible's unique and abundant record of fulfilled prophecy provides a basis for trusting the integrity of its unfulfilled predictions. It is what makes faith make sense.

The evidence for Jesus' resurrection provided by the disciples and the early church is very compelling. And their martyrdom for their faith in Jesus and eternal life provides a basis for trusting Christ's claim that we can also overcome death through him. In 1 Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul writes, "For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." (1 Corinthians 15:16-20)

As followers of Christ, we can experience the reality of a personal love relationship with God through his Spirit. The New Testament calls this God's "down payment" that guarantees that he will come through on his promises concerning the next life. 2 Corinthians 5:1 says, "For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 Corinthians 5:1)

Verse 5 says, "Now He who has prepared us for this very thing *is* God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So *we are* always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight." (2 Corinthians 5:5-7)

Christians who understand this truth are substantially delivered from the fear of death, and it is a truth that you can experience for yourself. Hebrews Chapter 2 says, "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the

power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Hebrews 2:14-15)

But the best reason the Bible's view of the afterlife is a better hope is that it's free. You don't have to earn your way to Heaven or a better afterlife. Eternal Life is guaranteed when you accept Jesus' forgiveness of your sins and His resurrection from the dead as a downpayment for your own resurrection to eternal life.

III. God Offers Is The Best Offer

Other religions always make the afterlife something you earn through good works in this life. They are based on works and offer no assurance of a desirable afterlife. In fact, the more devoutly you adhere to the offer made by other religions, the less assurance you have.

For Muslims, the Qur'an teaches, "Every man's actions have we hung around his neck, and on the last day shall be laid before him a wide-open book." (Sura 17:13) Sura 4:124 says, "If any do deeds of righteousness . . . and have faith, they will enter heaven." But how good do your deeds have to be, and how many of them? Muslims are told to observe the Five Pillars, but only Allah knows who will enter heaven and who will go to hell. There is no assurance of eternal life until the Muslim reaches the day of judgment, at which time it is commonly understood that all will be made to walk over the thin edge of a sword stretched across a deep abyss. Those who succeed will enjoy an eternity of sensual paradise. Those who fail will be consigned to torment in the raging fires of hell. Faith and good works during a person's life are believed to assist a person in passing this test. Muslims believe your good and bad works will be weighed on a large scale and influence whether you successfully cross the abyss into paradise."

Rabbinical Judaism (on which most modern Judaism is built) has the same problem. "At the time of a man's departure from this world, all his actions are detailed before him . . . He agrees and is then ordered to sign the record. He also admits the justice of the verdict and declares, 'Rightly hast Thou judged me.'" Therefore, Rabbi Yohanan Ben Zakkai laments at his imminent death: "Two paths now lie before me, one leading to Paradise and the other to Gehinnom (hell), and I know not which I am destined to take. Should I not then weep?"

Even in works-based versions of Christianity, we find the same problem. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, "Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, we can then merit for ourselves . . . the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life." Therefore, no one can know before they die whether they have eternal life because the Catholic Church's teaching is that I don't know, at any given moment, what my eternal future will be. I can hope, pray, and do my best—but I still don't know. By his own admission, Pope John Paul II didn't know that he would go to heaven, nor did Mother Theresa of Calcutta.

The Bible, however, teaches something very different. Eternal life is a free gift because it depends not on our good works for God but on Christ's perfect and finished work. Since the death of Christ pays the penalty for our sins, God makes the way to heaven available entirely apart from our works. If you are willing to put your trust in Christ's payment, you are guaranteed eternal life. Hundreds of biblical passages ring with this certainty! "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

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

Psalms 23:6, Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever." (Psalms 23:6)

At the crucifixion of Jesus, Luke 23, says, Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us." But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:39-43)

Conclusion

Very few people ever get the opportunity to make decisions that they know will positively impact the rest of their lives. But God extends this offer to everyone, no matter how undeserving they've been, because of his great love for us.

If you choose God's offer, it's a decision that you will never regret. You will never regret it because Christ will make your life immeasurably more meaningful and fulfilling. And even 10 million years from now, you'll still be marveling over the wonderful things that flow from your decision.

God offers us the gift of eternal life. You can receive that gift today by agreeing with God that you need his forgiveness, asking him to apply Christ's death to your sins, and giving you the assurance of Eternal life.

Your response makes all the difference.