**Facing the Last Enemy**

1 Corinthians 15:26

Don Maurer

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**Transcriber’s Note:** This lesson was not recorded. The transcript is from an audio file of a similar presentation from a recent Sunday school session taught by Don Maurer at his church.

**Don:** Okay. This is “Facing the Last Enemy, Part 2.” Let me just briefly review what we covered for those of you who may not have been here or forgot. I’m taking my material from *Facing the Last Enemy,* the book and the video series by Guy Waters, a PCA pastor in Mississippi. I would highly recommend the book. It is the best modern book on the subject of death that I have ever read.

Now last time we talked about the reality of death and how our culture, and even some Christians, deal with it through denying it or not thinking about it or minimizing it. Next we dealt with the nature of death from the Scriptural perspective. There is physical death, spiritual death which everyone outside of Christ is even now experiencing, and then eternal death—the lake of fire, the second death.

We talked about the false views concerning what happens after death such as nonexistence, popularized by the John Lennon song “Imagine,” which was sung at Jimmy Carter’s “Christian” funeral a couple weeks ago. Also universalism, the idea that everyone goes to heaven, reincarnation, annihilationism, which means that there is no eternal conscious punishment for the wicked, and the Roman Catholic concept of purgatory.

We also talked about what theologians call the intermediate state, that is the state of our souls between the t time of our death and Christ’s return. The Bible also talks about the death of the wicked—those outside of Christ—that their souls are in torment in outer darkness, awaiting the judgment of the Great Day. For us who are in Christ it is eternal joy and bliss, beholding the face of Christ in light and glory, our bodies resting in their graves as in their beds: what Paul in Philippians 1 says is gain and far better than anything in this life.

And so today I hope to talk—really just scratching the surface,--about the resurrection—Christ’s resurrection and our resurrection, as well as that of unbelievers,--the final judgment and the eternal state. Then I’ll deal with a couple of hard questions, and finally just talk about helping others prepare for death, as well as our own preparation for death. Of course questions and comments are always welcome.

So let’s go now to Christ’s resurrection and our resurrection. I don’t think that we can overstate the importance of this central Biblical teaching. In my opinion it’s one of the most neglected teachings in the evangelical church today, and certainly in our culture. If you would talk to the average American about heaven,--if he or she even thinks about such things, and it may even be true for many Christians,--they think in terms of the soul only. People have a lot of silly sentimental notions. The person who has died is in a better place, whether or not that person had or even professed faith in Christ. Or they’re up there playing golf or football, if that’s what they liked to do, or whatever they did when they were on earth. How they do that without bodies is something I don’t know.

Now that’s kind of understandable, because we know what the person did and liked to do. But they think in terms only of the soul and not the body. Many people have a kind of Gnostic view of the body and of death: that the body is this prison and death releases us from it. No, God made us body and soul. Death is the separation of body and soul, and the body is just as important to God as the soul. Otherwise why did God in the Person of Christ become man? He had to become man to redeem us, to live a sinless life in our place, to die for our sins as our sin-bearer and our Substitute, and then—the capstone,--to gloriously rise from the dead on the third day.

I’m sure that I don’t need to tell you that the resurrection of our Lord, along with His atoning death, is the central teaching of the New Testament: in all four Gospels, in the book of Acts when the apostles preached to the Jews and the Gentiles, and in the writings of Paul and the other Biblical writers, particularly in 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul says that these things are “of first importance”, that Christ died, was buried, and rose from the dead.

The Corinthian church had people in it who believed that there was no resurrection, like the Sadducees. We know that if there is no resurrection from the dead then of course Christ has not been raised. Christ was a liar, since He predicted it on several occasions, and as a result we are still dead in our sins. According to Paul we are the most to be pitied. Think of all those who have been and are being persecuted for Christ who have died in vain and are suffering unspeakable torment. It’s all in vain if Christ didn’t rise from the dead.

The resurrection of our Savior is the only way that Christ would have been vindicated; His sacrifice was accepted by the Father. And there is no other explanation that is possible for what happened on that first Resurrection Sunday morning. The fact that Christ’s apostles and disciples suffered horrible, horrible torture and died rather than deny what they experienced and saw is ample evidence of its truth.

We’re not just talking about being deceived here. I talked to someone a few years ago said, “What about those on 9/11 who perpetrated those crimes? They were all martyred. What about Jim Jones and people like that?” Well, we’re not talking about people who believed that what they did was right, or were deceived in some way. These are people who knew supposedly that this was a lie. I don’t know many people who would go through the torment and torture and death that the apostles suffered for something that they absolutely knew was a lie.

Jesus says in John 14 that because He lives, we shall live also;--not just our souls, but our bodies. The intermediate state is far better than what we experience in this life, but not the best; that is yet to come at the resurrection. In Revelation chapter 6 we have the souls of those under the altar. I realize that this is apocalyptic literature. But the souls under the altar are saying, “How long, O Lord, before we are vindicated?” That happens at the resurrection. And when Christ returns our bodies will be transformed into the likeness of Christ’s glorious body.

We’ll have the same bodies that we had, but they will be transformed and incorruptible. I always think of Handel’s “Messiah,” the one song where “the trumpet shall sound.” Incorruptible, imperishable, eternal.

We can go into all kinds of fruitless speculation about what that will be like--John Calvin called them “silly and childish”—about the nature of our glorified bodies and what we’ll be able to do. Some people think for example that we’ll be able to go through walls or doors because they think that Jesus did that when He appeared to the disciples; we just don’t know. I’ve often wondered if we’ll be able to traverse the universe. I don’t know. But we do know that Christ’s body was completely glorified, and our bodies are going to be just like that. That’s all we need to know.

Without the resurrection of the body that is articulated in the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed, death and the grave would have the final say; they would have the final vict4ory.

Of course the Bible also speaks of the resurrection of the wicked—the unrighteous, the unbelievers. Jesus said in John 5:28 that *“the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves shall hear His voice and come forth: those who have done good”*—that is, Christians,--*“to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil”,--*those outside of Christ,--*“to the resurrection of condemnation.”* Paul said to Felix in Acts 24:15 that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. So let us never forget or neglect this vitally important doctrine.

Okay. We go on now to the final judgment. The Bible teaches frequently and emphatically that final judgment awaits every one of us. Psalm 1 verse 5 says that *“the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment.”* Psalm 7 verse 11 says that *“God is a just Judge.”* Hebrews 9:27 says that “it is appointed unto men once to die, and then the judgment.”

But it is our Lord who spoke of judgment more than anyone else. In Matthew 12 verse 37 He says that “every idle word” is going to have to be accounted for in the judgment. Jonathan Edwards said this: If every idle word is going to be given account for in the judgment, what about every idle deed? What about every cruel deed? What about lots and lots of idle words, and lots and lots of idle deeds, and lots and lots of cruel deeds? Wow!

And then of course Matthew 25:31-46, among others.

**Transcriber’s Note:** The parable of the sheep and the goats.

**Don:** Jesus talks about the final judgment of believers and unbelievers,--the sheep and the goats,--in that passage. Now I’m convinced that in our more and more sexual—yes, it is sexual; it’s also secular!—our more and more secular culture, that very few people really believe that there will be a final judgment. Otherwise the conduct of people would be very different, wouldn’t it? I know that during World War II, with the horrors that the Nazis and the Communists perpetrated, as atheists, “there’s no accountability; I don’t have to worry about anything.” Of course Scripture says that, and a lot of unbelievers feel that way.

Of course the Bible has a lot to say about this subject, and I won’t have the time to do it justice. But let me just say this: The final judgment is essential to the gospel message. Of course it is bad news for unbelieving sinners. And that is why so many people deny or suppress that today, and maybe even some of us.

Grace, (a congregant), said it the last time. It’s very hard to think about the subject of eternal punishment. It is; it’s not a pleasant thing to think about at all. But God must punish sin, and He must punish sinners, for God is a God of justice. Last week it was talked on the media about the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. We can only cringe in horror at all the horrible things that the Nazis perpetrated on the Jews and others. There were the Nuremberg trials and people were sentenced to death. But we know that a death sentence can’t possibly do justice to what those sins deserve. And that is why there has to be a hell. I believe it was Aristotle and then Immanuel Kant, who were not Christians, said that there has to be an afterlife where perfect justice is meted out.

We have to know the bad news before we can possibly appreciate the good news of the gospel. Also the final judgment helps us to understand the work of Christ on our behalf, doesn’t it? He bore the curse of God. He bore the wrath of God, the equivalent of hell itself, and was the willing and perfectly righteous sin-bearer in our place. Because of His sinless life we stand before Him now and on that great day justified. And that is the best news that we can ever hear. To neglect this doctrine is to neglect the work of Christ.

Now who will stand before God at the final judgment? Angels and every human being who has ever lived. As far as the angels are concerned, Jude verse 6 and 2 Peter 2:6-8 talk about the angels in the intermediate state as it were, in dungeons of torment, waiting for the judgment of the Great Day.

**Transcriber’s Note:** 2 Peter 2:4, NKJV. *“For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them to chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment.*

Jude 6: *“And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.”*

**Don:** And then of course Satan and his minions are cast into the lake of fire. Now here’s an important point. Both Christians and non-Christians will stand before God and give account to Him on that day. A lot of Christians misunderstand this. I remember several years ago when a church in Steubenville was part of our denomination, and I mentioned that we will all give an account. The pastor who was there at that time who was kind of left-leaning was shocked that I would say such a thing. “We stand before Christ; we’re justified; we don’t have anything to worry about.” By the way I was not invited to preach there again.

Now it is certainly true that we are justified, and that Christ has taken care of our sins; that’s very true. And as I said before, that’s the best news we could ever hear. *“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* Romans 8:1. But Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:10 that *“we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”* And the author of Hebrews says that *“all things are laid bare before Him to whom we”*—Christians—*“must give an account.”*

Now that initially sounds very frightening, doesn’t it? It’s frightening to me. But in a few minutes I want to say some things that will hopefully reassure all of us.

Obviously it is Christ who will be the judge. Christ says in John 5 that *“the Father has entrusted all judgment to the Son.”* Paul told the audience at the Areopagus that God “will judge the world by the Man He has appointed,” who is Christ.

What will be the standard of judgment? It is the law of God which is written on the hearts of everyone. People say, how could it be fair for those who have never heard of Christ to be in hell? Well, the reason for that is because they have the law of God written upon their hearts, even if they were never exposed to the law of God and the gospel.

The judgment occurs at the Second Coming of Christ after the resurrection. I realize that there are a lot of believers who disagree with that eschatology, but I believe this is what the word of God teaches. The wicked are ushered into eternal punishment, and the righteous to eternal life. To the wicked Christ will pronounce sentence and give evidence. “Depart from Me; I never knew you, even though you said, ‘Lord, Lord,’” etc. “You did not visit me when I was sick or minister to me in any way. There was no evidence of saving faith in your life.”

And there are degrees of punishment according to knowledge: how much we knew, how much we were exposed to. Christ said, “To whom much is given, much is required.” It’s according to the heinousness of sins. If you killed one person, that’s terrible; if you killed many, that’s even worse. You can apply that however you wish. Also, the c circumstances that people are in; Christ spoke of those who will receive many stripes and those who will receive few. That’s something that we really can’t fathom. Hell is horrible no matter how you slice it, but there are degrees of horror.

Their mouths will be stopped. But they will acknowledge the justice of their sentence.

Now what will happen to those who are in Christ? Jesus says, *“Come, blessed of My Father! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!”* We will give an account. Paul says that each of us will give an account of himself to God in Romans 14:12. But the comfort of this is that we appear before Christ already justified. Presumably we will have experienced a taste of that when our souls are in glory. But we are already assured of our salvation when we are giving an account.

If this is so, you might wonder why we give an account at all. Well, there are a few reasons. #1. God is just and impartial, therefore He brings Christians as well as non-Christians before the bar of judgment.

#2. At the judgment God will put on display the public evidence of grace in our lives. Now this is not talking about earning anything or merit on our part, but grace. I don’t exactly know how that will all work out, but it will be glorious.

We stand before God. And the fact that we do stand before God in future judgment should guide us in the fear of God—not servile fear, not the fear of someone who is going to torture us; that will never happen to us,--but reverence, a fear of displeasing our Father who we love and who loves us.

I am sure that all of you, and I, loved my father. But I certainly feared disobeying him for the punishment that I would get. And even though we’re not going to be punished, we don’t want to displease Him; we don’t want to grieve the Holy Spirit. He loves us and we love Him.

2 Peter 3 says that these things are going to happen: The earth will be dissolved and it will be transformed through fire. So what kind of people ought we to be? We ought to be people who live godly lives. We are to be diligent to be found at peace with God.

And then #4. There are rewards in heaven. As there are degrees of punishment for the wicked, there are degrees of blessedness in heaven. These are all gracious rewards. According to Augustine, “Christ crowns His own works.” The person who had the ten talents is given more responsibilities and more rewards. The people in the parable of the workers in the vineyard get the same wages though they worked different amounts of time.

Now this is important. Our rewards are according to, but not on the basis of our works. Does everybody know the difference there? If they were on the basis of our works we would all be toast. *(Laughter)* All of our works have some pound of flesh in them. And our motives also are not pure; we know that.

But Scripture says this all through, and I like what the Westminster Confession says in chapter 16 about our works. None of our works are perfect; all of them would never pass the bar of God’s judgment. But because they are done in Christ God is pleased to reward that which is sincere, and that is a great comfort.

And there is not going to be any envy or dissatisfaction. Everyone shall be perfectly happy; everyone shall be perfectly satisfied. These are the words of Jonathan Edwards: *“Every vessel that is cast into this ocean of happiness is full, though there are some vessels that are larger than others.”*

*George Whitefield was asked one time if he would see John Wesley in heaven. And George Whitefield said “No, but not for the reason that you think.” Whitefield and Wesley were staunch opponents about election. Whitefield was a Calvinist, Wesley was an Arminian. They vehemently disagreed on the doctrine of election and debated each other, combatted each other. But Whitfield said, “I won’t see Wesley in heaven because he will surpass me in holiness. He will be closer to the throne of Christ.”*

*I think there are going to be people in heaven who are going to surpass me for sure. Perhaps not the big names that we know, but prayer warriors, maybe older people who spent their time in prayer even on sickbeds, who Jesus will reward. He said,* “Great is your reward in heaven” *to those who are persecuted and suffer for His sake. If you give even a cup of cold water to a disciple, you will by no means lose your reward. And so the greater the advances that we make in holiness and service to God in this life, the greater the degree of happiness we will enjoy in the next life. And of course Jesus calls us to store up treasures in heaven.*

*Do we need to fear or be afraid of the final judgment? Paul and John were not afraid of the final judgment. John said,* “Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.” *Paul said, “There is laid up henceforth for me a crown in glory.” We are already justified. The One who will judge us is also the One who has saved us and who now intercedes for us. He said that it is the Father’s good pleasure to give us the kingdom.*

*Now immediately I think this—and Guy Waters brings this up in the book;--what about my sin? What about our sins? I don’t know the extent of my sin. I know all too well the sins that I have to struggle with. There are sins that all of you have to struggle with, and sins that we aren’t even aware of. What about those?*

*Well, remember that according to Isaiah, Ezekiel and the Psalmist, they are separated from God as far as the east is from the west; an infinite distance. They’re gone, never to be remembered against us again. Yes, we will give an account to Christ for our lives. But we are already justified, and I don’t think that our sin is going to be shown before the whole world, because it has already been forgiven.*

*I remember Bailey Cadman, our former pastor, saying that even if they are shown before people we know they’ve already been forgiven. So it’s good, and it shouldn’t frighten us as it does initially. Our sins have been cast into the depths of the sea, and we eagerly await christ’s return. That’s what the book of Hebrews says. He is coming not to die or atone for our sins a second time, but to bring salvation 4to those who are eagerly waiting for His return.*

*And so we have the eternal state. Very briefly, we are going to have perfect, resurrected, glorified, incorruptible bodies made after the glorified body of Christ. We will be living on new heavens and a new earth. The earth won’t be destroyed, but it will be transformed.*

*There is eternal rest. Now that doesn’t mean idleness, though there are some who believe that that if I want to sleep I can. I don’t4 know if we would need that, but it will be wonderful. Rest means contentment, satisfaction, but not inactivity. We will be serving God forever. We’ll have all the time to do it. Sometimes I let my imagination run wild. Will I play the organ or the piano with Fanny Crosby or Bach? We can only imagine what this will be like: eternal worship, eternal joy, eternal fellowship with God and one another.*

*The ultimate joy of heaven is not that we’ll have no pain, though that is wonderful. It’s not a divine banquet that features the best chocolate imaginable.* (Laughter) *That’s* my take. I’m sure that we will have wonderful physical food and music that we’ve never imagined, or the great fellowship that we’ll have one with another; they’re all wonderful. But the ultimate joy of heaven is being with Christ. This has been called the Beatific Vision, where God shall be our God and we will be His people forever.

Many do not realize that heaven would not be heaven if this were not the case. John Piper picks this up from Augustine. If you were at a place where you would have everything on this earth that you would want—all the food, all the conveniences that we have now in this country with no pain, no suffering forever and ever—but if Christ were not there, it would not be heaven.

Now of course for those outside of Christ it’s the very opposite, isn’t it? Both states for the wicked and the righteous—for believers and unbelievers—are eternal and conscious. Infinite sin deserves infinite punishment. And God’s grace is infinite for believers. All right. Any questions or comments before I go on to the next subject?

Okay. Let’s deal now with a couple of hard questions. Why do we die as Christians? After all, Christ has paid the penalty, so why do we die? We die because *“the wages of sin is death.”* God said to Adam, “On the day that you eat the fruit you will die.” We die; that is something that has been passed on to us; the result of our sin is death.

But the good news is that death for us is the entrance into glory. Death is a fearful thing, indeed it is called *the last enemy.* I think it’s the unknown that causes us fear. How are we going to die? How is it going to happen to us? That’s a fearful thing. But Christ has conquered death and it is the entrance for us into glory.

This was brought up last time and I just briefly dealt with it. What happens to infants or others who don’t have the capacity to understand the gospel? Well, we need to realize that the Judge of all the earth will do what is right. I think this is the best Biblical answer that we have for this question.

I think there are hints in Scripture for the infants of believers. We see in 2 Samuel that David, after losing the child conceived in sin comes afterwards eating and drinking. And they are wondering, “David, why are you doing this now? Your child has just died.”

“He won’t come to me; I will go to him.” Now some people believe that means “I’ll die just as he did and I’ll go to the grave.” Others—and I would lean toward this,--would say that what David is saying is “I will see him again someday in glory.”

God’s faithfulness and mercy is said to extend to a thousand generations. That doesn’t mean that after the 1001st it stops; it means that it extends a long, long, long time.

As for the rest, God will do what is right. The Westminster Confession speaks of *“elec4t infants,”* and they leave it there. I think that is what we have to do too.

Then there is the question of suicide, self-murder. It’s a heinous sin to be sure. There are three people in Scripture who committed suicide, all unsavory characters:Saul,Ahithophel and Judas. We know what happened to Judas. Our Lord says that Judas was *“the son of perdition,”* suffering eternal punishment. As for the other two, we don’t know.

It’s a heinous sin to be sure; it’s a grievous sin. But it’s not the unpardonable sin.

I know of a pastor; maybe some of you know who I’m talking about. Several years ago this local pastor committed suicide because he was not in his right mind. He was on all kinds of medications and he had cancer. He was in unbearable pain. So suicide is grievous, but not unforgivable.

All right. So now we come at last to preparing for death. It’s quite a thing that we all have to think about. Of course we have physical preparations; I’m not going to deal with those: the book deals with them to a great extent. I’m talking about spiritual preparation, and helping others first of all to prepare for death.

I remember visiting my grandfather several years ago—many years ago, as a matter of fact. He was unconscious. But I talked to him. I sang some of the songs he used to like me to play on the organ. His hand began to move and I presented the gospel in detail to him for the first time in his life.

I don’t know where he is now. Nevertheless I think it was a good thing that I did that.

I remember visiting Bob Parker.

**Transcriber’s Note:** A church member who attended Brave Men.

**Don**: Wow, what a time that was! He was also slipping farther and farther into death. But we sang hymns to him. We read Bible passages to him. Someone said that you could tell by the expression on his face that he did hear us. His hand moved, etc.

And so we prepare believers for death, assuring them of the promises of God, assuring them of everything the Bible has to say, being there holding their hands, listening to what they have to say, assuring them of the grace of God. For unbelievers it’s never too late to present the gospel.

Now how do we prepare for our own death? Guy Waters gives some very good guidelines.

#1. *Attend to the means of grace.* That might seem rather obvious, but it is vitally important: Lord’s Day worship, the sacraments, the Word, prayer, fellowship with other believers. All of these strengthen our union with Christ. We’re not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Hebrews 10:25), but to encourage one another in love and good deeds. And the author of Hebrews says we are to do this all the more as we see the Day approaching, which is drawing closer for each one of us. Of course a big part of this is communing often with God in Christ. The means of grace help us to do that.

#2. *Hold this world loosely.* Now I realize that particularly as Americans in the 21st century that this is very hard to do because we have so many distractions. It happens to me all the time at Tapestry. The Internet doesn’t work very well and my streams go off and I can’t do my emails very well. And then I have to say, “Don, c’mon! This world is not my home. Cool your jets.” *(Laughter)* It’s all a matter of perspective, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7 and 1 Timothy 4. Yes, God gives us the things of this world and we are to receive them with thanksgiving. But we also have to realize and need to remember that we are under the curse of God; this world is under the curse of God, and so is the world system of evil. We are to live in the world as those who have no dealings with it. I know that sounds rather strange, but we are to hold all things loosely, because they are temporary. We are not just citizens of the U.S., but especially and primarily we are citizens of heaven. We have to remember that.

And then closely related to that is #3. *Think often of heaven.* Again, because we have so many distractions and so much entertainment and other things—working every day, all the cares of this life,--thinking about heaven is not an easy thing to do. I think that those suffering persecution in other countries do this more than we do. It’s been almost a year. In the hospital and during heart rehab my mind was on heaven. Suffering will do that; it will give us the perspective that this life is not all there is. It will make us long for heaven and eternal life, and that’s good.

#4. Next, compare this world to heaven. Here there is strife and toil; there, eternal rest. Here there is sin and corruption and oppression and death; there there is righteousness and eternal life.

Here there is uncertainty and loss. I’m sure those people on Wednesday night on that plane had no idea that they would be ushered into eternity. Houses catch on fire, stuff is stolen from us. This life is so uncertain. Moth and rust corrupt, thieves break in and steal.

But there our inheritance is imperishable, undefiled and unfading. Matthew 6:19-20 says that we are to lay up treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not corrupt, neither do thieves break in and steal.

#5. People, even the most sanctified of us, are not perfect. Those of you who are married know that very well, don’t you? Here that’s the case. But there we will be perfect, and they will be. And I am sure that there will be a reconciliation of Christians who may not have gotten along very well in this life. Jesus will take care of that and see to it that they are all reconciled.

But it won’t be boring. Some people say, “Won’t perfection be boring?” No it won’t, because it’s ultimate joy, ultimate love; we’ll be without sin. And we will love one another and enjoy fellowship with one another like nothing we have ever had on this earth. Hopefully the fellowship that we have as believers on this earth is a preview of what it will be in heaven. But I think that we’ll just be blown away by how wonderful it is.

And then finally,--and I’ll end with this,--#6. As stated before, to enter heaven, to enter the new heavens and the new earth, is to enter into the presence of God in Jesus Christ. And there isn’t a whole lot more that I can say than that. That is the ultimate joy, to be in Christ.

**Transcriber’s Note:** At this point the presentation concludes. There were a couple of questions relating to near-death experiences and our sanctification and perfection at death, with a concluding prayer from one of the elders at Providence Church.