

Is There Life After Death? (Part 4)
(Rev. Dr. John Bartol)

“The day in which the belief in an after-life shall vanish from the earth will witness a terrific moral and spiritual decadence. There is no lever capable of raising an entire people, if once they have lost faith in the immortality of the soul.” –Renan

The Evidence of History

A strong belief in immortality lodges deep within the hearts of people, in every age, the world over. From the Egyptian pyramids to New Age reincarnation, humans have displayed a persistent belief in an afterlife.

CS Lewis points out, “If you read history, you will find that the people who did the most for the present world were those who thought most of the world to come.” To give meaning to death is also to give meaning to life.

In recent years, thanks to the research of Dr. Elizabeth Kubler – Ross and Dr. Raymond Moody, there is a growing body of evidence for NDE-“Near death or out-of- body experiences.” NDE has now become a legitimate, scholarly field of medical science and specialists are intrigued with the remarkable consistency of what they are hearing.

Dr. Maurice Rawlings, a specialist in cardiovascular disease, has conducted dozens of on- the- scene interviews with patients returning from clinical death who experienced transitions into another life. Dr. Rawlings, sceptical at first, now finds the evidence overwhelming.

He reports how some recall a very pleasant experience with bright lights, angelic guides and even the recognition of loved ones. Others tried to suppress the memory of utter darkness and isolation as they reluctantly reported a dreadful experience.

This growing body of evidence shows that people approaching death sense they are experiencing, not the end of existence, but the beginning of another. The gift of free will allows humanity to choose between glorious light or terrifying darkness – an endless hope or a hopeless end. In contrast, God has prepared an awe-inspiring place for us to spend eternity and he wants to enjoy it with us!

Recently, four chaplains met to discuss the attitudes of their patients toward death. They were all serving in special care homes for the elderly. One chaplain reported, “Most of my people die little by little, prior to actual death.” Another spoke of patients showing signs of “depression and despair”.

They were all touched by a story about a ninety-five year old woman who would always greet her chaplain with a smile. “Well Pastor, any day now I’ll be seeing

my Lord. It might be today, but it won't be long." For her, the possibility of death, rather than creating distress, was actually, a source of joyful expectation. She was able to affirm life with enthusiasm because death was no longer an enemy. Fear was overcome with faith and hope.

" Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so...
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more: Death thou shalt die!

John Donne