

This is the will of My Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day...I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall live, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.

- John 6:40; 11:25, 26

The whole point of living a spiritual life is to die with Christ to the sins of this world and to pass through the experience of bodily death with Him in order to be raised up “on the last day” in His Kingdom.

If we have died with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we endure, we shall also reign with Him.

- 2Timothy 2:11, 12

RECOGNITION

By the power of the risen Christ and the grace of the Holy Spirit, death is transformed to an act of life. Death remains a tragedy, yet our Faith in the risen Lord transforms it into the ultimate defeat of “the last enemy - death.”

In fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a Man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

- 1Corinthians 15:20-22

When confronted by death, we can only weep and mourn as Christ did when He confronted the death of His friend Lazarus; but death is not an end for those who have been made alive in Jesus Christ.

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep.

- 1Thessalonians 4:14

In the Epistle reading proclaimed during the Orthodox funeral service, Saint Paul tells us that he does not wish us to be ignorant concerning death. Without an abiding faith in the risen Christ and the anticipation of our own resurrection from the dead, Saint Paul notes that we are left hopeless. No amount of reason will “solve” the problem. Only in the risen Christ, who has trampled down death by death, can a solution be found.

FOR ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS, THEN, DEATH:

- is *not* something “willed” by God;
- is *not* the “ultimate end,” for those whose faith is in the risen Christ are promised eternal life; and
- becomes our joyous entrance into God’s Kingdom and our own personal sharing in Christ’s greatest victory, His resurrection.

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DEATH



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We live in a death-denying culture. Death is something that happens to the *next* person. “It can’t happen to me.” The denial of death, however, is not universal nor is it Christian. Many people in various cultures centre their lives around death, and there exists a limitless range of attitudes and beliefs surrounding death and dying.

The three major approaches to death exist: the *philosophical*, the *secular*, and the *Christian*.

- Many **philosophies** attempt to address the presence of death. Life is often viewed as a “pathway” to death, and rationalisation is sometimes used to explain its existence. For example, the ancient Greek philosopher Plato understood death as the soul’s release from captivity, comparing it to a butterfly being freed from its cocoon. In death, Plato reasoned, humanity is finally freed to become that which it was destined to be. Some religious philosophies regard death as something “willed” by God or as but one of many links in the chain of reincarnation.
- **Secularism**, on the other hand, attempts to explain death in terms of life. Secularism replaces any notion or concept of an “other” world with the idea that the only existence known to humanity is *this one*. People choose whether or not to make their lives meaningful, and they are responsible for their own destinies. Life is to be lived and enjoyed, while death is a natural, if inconvenient, intruder.

Many of our society’s funeral practices - the “homey” decor with which we surround the deceased, the beautification of the departed, and the attempts often made to display little pain or emotion - are secular by nature because they accept death as a natural occurrence.

- **Christianity** approaches death in a uniquely different manner. Recognising that everyone is destined to die, Orthodoxy understands the preparation for death as the very centre of the spiritual life. That humanity should die is not the will of God.

God did not make death, and takes no pleasure in the destruction of any living thing: He created all things that they might have being..

- Wisdom of Solomon 1:13,14

THE END RESULT

Death, in Christian teaching is the *result* of sin. It is the *final victory* of the devil - the result of his destructive activity. If humanity had not sinned, death would not have entered into the world.

As such, death is in no way “natural” to humanity. Our “natural” existence, as God so willed at the time of creation, is found in the fact that we were not created to die, but rather to be in eternal communion with the God Who is Life Itself. Had it not been for sin, our bodies would not have been separated from the spirit to return to the dust, while our souls would not have been corrupted by losing power over the body and becoming its slave.

This is the meaning of the sin of Adam - humanity, created in God’s image and enlivened by His Holy Spirit, chose death instead of life and evil instead of righteousness.

Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned. - Romans 5:12

LIVING TO DIE

In this sin-bound world, no one escapes death. Even Jesus Christ did not escape death; although, as the incarnate Son and Word of God, He did not *need* to die. He died to bring about the salvation of His People; His death was perfectly and purely *voluntary*, the ultimate revelation of God’s love.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. - John 3:16

By His death, Jesus Christ liberates all who have been captive by death’s power.

For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it again; this charge I have received from My Father. - John 10:17-18

Through His death and resurrection, however, humanity is raised from the dead; eternal life in the kingdom of God is made possible. This is the very basis of Orthodox Christianity.