

Death

Memory Verse: *“When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish”.*
(Psalm 146:4 - ESV)

Introduction: Man is unwilling to consider the subject of death. He labors vigorously to continually keep thoughts of death far from his mind. He would stay there always if he could; but since he cannot, he ventures to put away every reminder of death as far as possible from his sight.ⁱ The ancient Egyptians had a different view of death. The Greek essayist Plutarch (46 to 120 A.D), wrote that at every feast the Egyptians would place a skeleton or mummy at the head of their table – he ate not, he drank not, he spoke not and he was closely veiled. He was there to warn them that even in their feasting, they should remember there would be an end to life.

We are so fond of living that such Memento Mori are no longer considered in our society. (Memento Mori - Latin term for “remember you have to die” which is a symbolic trope that acts as a reminder of the inevitability of death). These types of reminders would be quite unbearable in our days of “feasting”. Yet - Deuteronomy 32:29 reminds us that *“if only they were wise and would understand this and discern what their end will be”*. Certainly, we should be wise and consider our end, for the practical effect of a true meditation upon death would be exceedingly healthy to our spirits.

Meditations upon death would lessen our sinful desires for covetousness and greed, always longing after more and trying to accumulate for ourselves great wealth and prosperity. If we only remembered that one day we will have to leave our houses and businesses behind, we would most certainly not hold on as tight to the things of this world. Perhaps more contemplation on death might lead us to set our affections upon things above and help us put a greater emphasis on *“storing up treasures in heaven where moths and rust do not destroy, nor thieves break in and steal”*. In addition - Meditations upon death might often check us when we are about to sin. If we look at sin by the light of death's lantern, we might see more of the hollowness of sinful pleasure and the emptiness of worldly vanity. Surely, we should be kept back from many evil acts if we remembered that *“we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ”*. Lord willing, this short study on death will lead you to consider your final days. May the Holy Spirit bend your thoughts downward to the tomb. May He guide you to the grave, that there you may see the end of all earthly hopes, of all worldly splendor and earthly pleasures.

Types of Death: Death is ultimately undefinable. The reality of felt separation that it conveys when we lose our loved ones goes far beyond words. The word separation, therefore, must lie at the heart of our feeble attempts to define death. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body. But that is not all there is to death, since our physical death is not the end of our existence. The Bible also speaks of two kinds of death that are far worse: spiritual death and eternal death. These two kinds of death are also the wages of sin.ⁱⁱ

Spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God's favor. That happened instantaneously to Adam in Paradise when he fell into sin. That is how we are born by nature as fallen sons and daughters of sin, separated from God in our soul though receiving benefits from God for our bodies. David put it this way: *“Behold, I was brought forth in guilt, and in sin my mother conceived me”* (Psalm 51:5). And Paul wrote to the Ephesians, *“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins”* (Eph 2:1). That is why Jesus said of everyone who is born into this world: *“You must be born again”* (Joh 3:7).ⁱⁱⁱ

Eternal death is the separation of a person's soul and body from God forever in hell. Hell is a final and irreversible state (Luk 16:25-26) of punishment (Mat 25:46), torment (Mar 9:44), destruction (2Th 1:9), imprisonment (Jude 6), as well as darkness, grief, and pain (Mat 8:12). In eternal death, those justly condemned to hell do not even experience the common mercies of God that the unbeliever experiences in this life; the wrath of God is poured out without mixture upon the damned forever (Rev 14:10-11). In hell, the damned are ever dying but never fully physically dead even as they remain under spiritual and eternal death - without intermission, without a second chance, without annihilation, and without an end (Isa 33:14; Mat 25:41; Jude 8). Truly, *"the wages of sin is death"* - physical death, spiritual death, eternal death.^{iv}

Origin of Death: The Bible is very clear about the origins of Human death, and how and why it is passed on. Human Death was not part of the original creation. In Genesis 1 when God finished the work of creation, He declared that everything He had made was good *"And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."* (Gen. 1:31) Man was created with glory, dignity and value. He was created with the capacity to worship God and the authority to rule the earth forever. That was the world as it was "meant to be" - perfectly ordered according to God's purpose. There were no hospitals, pharmacists, funerals or graveyards. When God pronounced the creation was good, He really meant it. Death, therefore, is something abnormal. God created humans to live, not die. Sin is the runaway virus that once introduced changed everything. It brought the disorder, suffering, and death that we have today.^v

God placed Adam and Eve in the perfect environment of Eden. The Lord issued a specific commandment to them, *"The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may freely eat; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for on the day that you eat from it you will certainly die."* (Gen. 2:16-17) God freely and graciously bestowed many privileges on Adam. Everything Adam needed was available in abundance. Eden was paradise for him to delight and enjoy. However, with these wonderful privileges came obligations. Eden was not to be a place of unrestricted pleasure.^{vi} There were things that Adam was required to do, "to dress it and to keep it" and things he was allowed to do, *"From any tree of the garden you may freely eat"* and things he was not permitted to do, *"but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat."* Eating the fruit of this tree would give Adam an experiential knowledge of good and evil in a similar way a cancer patient has experiential knowledge of cancer that a person who has never had cancer will understand.^{vii}

MacArthur explains further, "It was not a poisonous tree. It wasn't a tree with toxic fruit. There was no toxic anything in the perfect creation of God. There was no poison. There was nothing in the fruit of that tree that somehow altered genetics. There was nothing in that tree that somehow killed some principle of life in an individual, dealing some deadly blow to his soul. That was a good tree, and the fruit was perfectly good, because everything God made was good, everything. There was nothing harmful in the tree itself, there was nothing harmful in the fruit of the tree. Like everything else, it was very good. But eating from it was very bad, because eating from it produced the knowledge of evil. Man already knew good. That's all he knew was good, he didn't know anything but good. But he would know if he ate of that good and evil. And as soon as he ate of that tree, he would die."^{viii}

All Must Die:^{ix} Let us now look at man's eternal state, into which he enters by death. Of this entrance, Job makes a solemn statement, "*For I know that you will bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living.*" Job 30:23. The words of this text contain a general truth and a particular application of it; namely, that all men must, by death, be removed out of this world. Where do these men go? They go to the "*house appointed for all living*". In other words, they go to the grave - that dark, gloomy, solitary house, in the land of forgetfulness. The grave is where our body is laid up until the resurrection.

All the living must become inhabitants of this house, good and bad, old and young, smart and dumb, rich and poor. It is appointed for all, by Him whose counsel shall stand and by whose decrees will never be thwarted. Our meeting with death cannot be altered, changed, rescheduled, put off or postponed in anyway whatsoever. Job's application of this general truth to himself, is expressed in these words: "*For I know that you will bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living.*" He knew that he must meet with death; that his soul and body must part from one another and that God, who had set the time, would certainly see it kept.

This doctrine is confirmed by the experience of all former generations, ever since Abel entered the "*house appointed for all living*". Even though the living know that they will die, there is an urgency that should be considered when contemplating death. The reality of it, the finality of it and the certainty of it, should all be pressed upon our hearts and minds and seriously considered.

Therefore consider...

1. There is an unalterable appointment with death, under which all men have a reservation: "*It is appointed for men to die once....*" (Heb. 9:27). This appointment is fixed by the decrees of an omnipotent God who has sovereign control over every breath in a man's lungs and over every beat of a man's heart. We know this appointment is fixed because Ecclesiastes 8:8 states "*No man has authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority over the day of death....*" Our future appointment with death is as certain as the rising and setting of the sun, the phases of the moon or the changing of the seasons. Although the timing is decreed and known by God, none of us truly know when this meeting will take place. Some of us will experience warning signs of death, others may see death coming from a distance, but for most of us, death will come upon us suddenly and unexpectedly like a "*thief in the night*".
2. Let us consider by daily observation: Every man "*sees that even the wise die; the fool and the stupid alike must perish,*" (Psalm 49:10). There is enough room on this earth for us, notwithstanding the multitudes that were here before us. They are gone, to make room for us; and we must depart, to make room for others. Death has been transporting men into another world for a very long time. Vast multitudes have already departed and yet death is carrying off new inhabitants daily to the "*house appointed for all living*". The grave has never uttered the words "I am full, or that is enough". It has an insatiable appetite that will never cease until the day that it will be thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14). Death is a relentless and irresistible messenger, who cannot be restrained from executing his orders by the force of the mighty, the bribes of the wealthy, or the petitions of the poor. Death shows no mercy or favor to the aged or infant alike. Life and death are like a large marketplace, where some are coming in and others are going out, or like a town situated on the road to a great city, through which some travelers have passed, some are passing, while others have just come in. Ecclesiastes 1:4, "*A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever..*"

3. The human body consists of perishing materials: *"for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.."* (Gen. 3:19). The strongest men are but brittle earthen vessels, easily broken into pieces. Our souls are weakly housed in this mortal body which is built of clay and easily destroyed by the slightest touch. When we consider the frame and structure of our bodies, we must remember that we are *"fearfully and wonderfully made"*. Yet God, in His infinite wisdom has made us like a vapor of water which appears for a moment and then vanishes away. (James 4:14). The body and all its balances have been perfectly designed and created like nothing else - yet a simple infection, a bite from an insect, or a small virus, can, and often does bring down this house of clay. The fragility of life is an amazing thing to consider! Yes, we are *"fearfully and wonderfully made"* and yet our lives are liable to thousands of accidents every day, any of which may bring us to archways of death's door. Today you may have been successful in escaping these dangers - however - tomorrow you must rise up and face them again.

4. Man's life in this world, according to the Scriptural account of it, is but a few degrees removed from death: The Scripture represents life as a vain and empty thing - short in its continuance, and swift in its passing away. Yes - Man's life is a vain and empty thing! - Job 7:6, *"My days are vanity."* If we suspect afflicted Job of partiality in this matter, hear the wise and prosperous Solomon recount the days of his life, Eccl. 7:15, *"All things have I seen in the days of my vanity,"*. Few men have the right apprehensions of life, until death awakens their senses. If we look on our life and the different periods of it, what we will see is a heap of vanities. *"Childhood and youth are vanity,"* Eccl. 11:10. Our childhood is spent in worthless pleasures, youth is a flower that soon withers, a blossom that quickly falls off. It is a space of time in which we are rash, foolish, inconsiderate and pleasing ourselves with a variety of vanities. But before we are aware that season has passed; we are in middle age, encompassed with a thick cloud of worries, through which we must find our way. We are constantly harassed with various pains, difficulties, and obstacles that we must force our way through just to accomplish the projects and goals that we have set our hearts and minds upon. Then comes old age, along with it comes a list of infirmities, labors, and sorrows. The inability to recall stories, places, memories, names and events, the inability for our lungs to carry us up a flight of stairs and eventually the inability to dress and feed ourselves. Certainly, all life is vanity!

A Biblical Attitude Towards Death: One second after death, where will you be? You could be in Hell, *"lifting up your eyes in torment"*, grasping for someone or something to comfort you. What a dreadful thought to consider! But it is not impossible. If you die under the guilt of sin; if you die without having experienced a new birth; it is for certain. *"For unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"*. In Hell, no one's prayers will help your current state, none of your sufferings will excite pity, your cries, screams and tears will not be regarded by anyone. All hope and mercy will be closed off and severed from you for all of eternity, your lot will be despair and agony that must be endured perpetually.^x

If you should die without of Christ, without repentance, without holiness - then what will you be? You will be a lost soul, a ruined sinner and a person condemned to suffer God's just wrath! You will forever experience the bitter reflections of your own mind and the fearful lashings of your own conscience. Self-condemned and condemned by all around you. You will be a spectacle of misery; a monument of God's justice; a terrified witness to God's holiness and truth. Then you will know the meaning of those terrible words, *"Indignation, wrath, outer darkness, gnashing of teeth, tribulation and anguish"*. You will experience what is meant by being *"cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone,"*. There you will feel all the unknown horrors of the "second death." What a fearful thing must *sin* (our sin) be to demand such tremendous punishment at the hands of a just and holy God.^{xi}

But if you die a believer in Jesus; if cleansed in His blood; if clothed in His righteousness; if sanctified by His Spirit, if united to His person - then where you be one second after death? You will be with Jesus! You will hear His sweet voice, see His lovely face, and stand before His glorious throne. You will be in Heaven; the home of the saints; the house of the living God - the region of holiness, happiness, and love.^{xii} Death for a believer is Precious in the sight of God - *Psalm 116:15* - "*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones*". Viewed from God's perspective, death simply means that one of His children is finally "coming home".

It is certainly true that the righteous have hope in their death. A dying day is a good day to a godly man. In fact - it is his best day; it is better to him than his birthday, or all the days that he lived joyously upon the earth. He is not driven away as a prisoner to execution; but he is led away as a bride to the marriage chamber, carried away by the angels into Abraham's bosom. It is certainly true that "*all things work together for the good of those who love Christ*" and death is one of these "*all things*" for a saint.

Let us observe where death carries the true believer.

The righteous are carried away to a place of rest: Not just any rest but a perfect rest. Imagine a place where there are no deadlines, no urgent matters, no tiresome labors and no distractions. Yes, there will be work in heaven - but our labors will be done for a glorious King, and they will be performed in heavenly bodies that never grow weary. It is a rest from our fears because in Heaven we will be protected by a powerful King. It is a rest from our worries because in Heaven all our needs will be met. It is a rest from carnal desires because our bodies will have shed their nature of sin, and we will no longer be tossed by the waves of our licentious behavior.

The righteous are carried away to a place of security: "*There the wicked cease from troubling*" (*Job 3:17*). In this world the wicked and righteous are a mixed multitude, but in the next world no such mixture exists. Each party is set there by themselves for all of eternity. Although there may be tares among the wheat in this world - death will uproot them in the next and they will be bound together in bundles for the fire. This gives saints reason to rejoice because they know that they are protected by the all-powerful hand of God. They know that there will never be any intrusion from those in hell who would wish to destroy the happiness and joys of the saints in Heaven. In fact - if all the armies of hell were to stand at the gates of heaven and try to usurp Gods authority or overthrow his kingdom, it would have no effect. In Heaven, the saints are perfectly protected - the schemes of the devil nor the sting of death have no power over the inhabitants of paradise.

The righteous are carried away to the presence of the saints and their loved ones who have died in Christ: In heaven our company shall consists of saints - we shall recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We will enjoy the company of prophets, apostles, martyrs, and holy ministers forever. What glorious company we will keep. There will be no distinction between rich and poor, smart and dumb, Jew and Greek. We will feed from the same pasture; we will drink from the same living waters, and we will all be of the same flock. We will live in a city comprised of a chosen people, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation. A people for Gods own possession marked out long before the foundation of the world. We will spend all of eternity in Heaven with our loved ones who have died in Christ - we will eat, we will drink, and we will discourse with them in perfect fellowship throughout eternity.

The righteous are carried away to a place of joy and unimaginable happiness: *“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no heart has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).* The abundant treasure which God has secured in the heavens is far beyond what our human minds can comprehend. When the righteous are carried away into Heaven their joy shall be made full and their happiness made complete. After millions of years passed in eternity they will still be at the beginning. It is always the beginning in eternity - there is no middle and there is never an end, whatever time has passed bears no proportion to what is to come. So, it is with the kingdom of God - it is a kingdom not made of human hands with perishable materials that moths and rust can destroy. A million years from now the walls of jasper, streets of gold and gates of pearls will shine with the same luster as they did on the first day they were created.

The righteous are carried away to a place free from sin: In Heaven you will no longer be imprisoned, hindered, and pained by a body of flesh, or by a body of sin and death. You will be surrounded with myriads of your brothers and sisters, all perfectly holy, and perfectly happy. You will be a saint, fully sanctified, and made fit for your Master's use. To doubt your election, question your calling, or suspect your sincerity, will be impossible. You will be holy as your Father is holy. You will be as perfect, as your Savior is perfect, and you will be without fault before the throne of God. It is an amazing mystery that someone so sinful, with so many faults, so deeply depraved, so dreadfully polluted will be pronounced faultless by the King of kings and Judge of all.^{xiii}

Preparing for Death - How to die well: As Christians, we of all people should embrace the importance of finishing the race well. The Puritans concluded that a person should aim to “die well.” By “dying well,” they mean that a person should accept death while remaining faithful to the Lord.^{xiv}

Therefore, let us consider ways in which we can prepare to “die well” (Not exhaustive).

--- Commit your departing soul to Jesus: The only way to face death with a calm confidence is by trusting in Jesus Christ to save you from your sin. Its resigning and committing your departing soul into the hands of the one who is able to receive it. If you are to die comfortably you must swing out into eternity on the single thread of the person and work of Jesus Christ. You must believe that Christ is who He claims to be, that He will do what He promises to do and then put yourself in the hands of the One who has been appointed to save, that He may save you. If you are not in Christ, whatever your afflictions are now “troubles a thousand times worse, are awaiting you in another world.” So today, if you hear His voice don't harden your heart. Don't seer your conscious and reject the only conduit through which mercy can flow.

This is by far the greatest offer in the history of the world - the best of Him placed upon you, the worst of you placed upon Him - complete relief from the utter exhaustion of trying to carry the weight and burden of sin on your own. How could such a gracious invitation ever be refused? How could such a merciful offer never be given a second thought? The sad truth is that some of the people reading this will reject His offer of peace; some of you will finish this lesson and set your mind back to temporal and trivial things. Don't let the devil snatch these words from your heart, don't step back into the busyness of life and say in your heart that you will make peace with God on another day! This may be the final mention of Christ that you ever hear before you step into eternity – this may be the last offer of peace that is ever made between you and your creator. Do not be deceived into believing that you can escape condemnation if you reject such a great offer of salvation. If you are to die well, you must die trusting in Christ as your personal Lord and Savior!

--- Be ready and willing to part from your earthly relationships and treasures: Once the soul is launched into eternity, it enters an invisible world full of unknown spirits. The alliances, relationships, friendships and unions that we once had on this side of eternity are no longer. You will be stripped of all your titles and all the identities that you once had in this life. You will no longer be a father, husband, son, brother, neighbor, worker or friend. Your spouse will possibly remarry, someone will replace you at your place of employment, and your possessions will be distributed to others (possibly to strangers who you don't even know). The point is, not to be overly attached to anything, and to keep a pilgrimage/sojourner perspective because everything that is presently true in your life apart from Christ, apart from the things of God, everything else in your life is going to change instantly and forever.

--- Rest in God's ordained times and seasons of your death, and the ordained ways and means of your death:^{xv} How and when you will die isn't something that you can control, however; it is something you can learn to accept. Most men die with future plans, but these plans perish on the day that they die. (Psalm 146:4). Many men fear death because they are not content with the "season" in which God has given them to live, or the "means" in which God has destined them to die. They have determined in their hearts that they should have a peaceful death. They have set their minds upon the notion that they shall pass into the next world in comfort and ease. They believe they are entitled to die surrounded by those whom they love and by those who love them, in the peace of their own homes and their own beds.

These men fail to consider that it may not be God's will for them to die in a comfortable way. They fail to consider that sickness and disease may be part of God's perfect and good plan for their life (or even their death). There is nothing sinful in asking God for a long life or even a comfortable death – however – when we make petitions to our heavenly Father they must end with "Yet not my will, but your will be done". In all events and circumstances, we must resign ourselves to the sovereign will, pleasure, and disposal of God. After all, He is the potter, and we are the clay (Romans 9:21). Is not His will in all things infinitely holy, wise, just, perfect and good? Does He not know what is best for us, and what contributes most to His own glory? We are at His sovereign disposal; and His will in all things must be complied with. Without this resolution, without this resignation, no man can enjoy peace in his death.

--- Put your house in order: Preparing for your death involves putting your house in order. This phrase is used in Isaiah 38:1, where the prophet Isaiah tells Hezekiah to "put your house in order" because he is dying. In addition, Ahithophel "set his house in order" before his death (2 Samuel 17:23) and David made "preparations" for his son Solomon before his death (1 Chronicles 22:5). Making preparations for your loved ones prior to your death will certainly help alleviate some of their stress when you are gone.

Here is a short list of things for you to consider. (Not exhaustive)

Note: Keep these documents organized, accessible and updated regularly. Last will and testament, healthcare directive, durable power of attorney, organ donation, life insurance policies, trusts, beneficiary designations, list of property assets, funeral arrangements, living trust, power of attorney, financial accounting, passwords for your devices and accounts, birth certificate, social security card, driver's license, marriage license, car insurance, home insurance, property deeds, retirement accounts (Pension & 401k), digital assets. Choose an executor, CPA, Financial Advisor and an estate planning attorney. Make a list of important contacts for your spouse, write an obituary. If you are a business owner, make a plan for your non liquid assets and address the disposition of tangible personal property.

Discussion Questions:

1. What insights do the following Bible passages - *Ecclesiastes 6:12*, *James 4:13-17*, *Psalm 90:10*, and *Psalm 103:15-16* - offer about the nature, brevity, and purpose of life?
2. What truths about the certainty, universality, and nature of death can you discern from the following Bible passages: *Ecclesiastes 9:2-3*, *Hebrews 9:27*, *Ecclesiastes 8:8a*, *Psalm 146:4*, and *Job 34:20*?
3. How often do you reflect on your own mortality? When you consider the reality of death, what thoughts or emotions come to mind? If you knew you would die tomorrow, what unfinished tasks or unresolved relationships would you most regret?
4. How has your view/perspective on death been formulated? Have there been any personal experiences with death (either as an adult or child) that have shaped your perspective?

5. What is the prevailing view of death in our culture, and how do you see society attempting to avoid or 'cheat' its reality? Why do you think death is such a difficult topic for people to confront openly in today's world?

6. Based on the following passages - *1 Thessalonians 4:13-14*, *Philippians 1:21*, and *Psalms 116:15* - how should Christians view death from a biblical perspective? In what ways can you bring your view of death into greater alignment with God's perspective as revealed in Scripture?

7. What changes or practices could you implement to better prepare yourself to 'die well' in a way that honors God? How should the certainty of death influence the way you live your daily life and prioritize your time?

8. The particular truth in this lesson that has had the greatest impact on me is^{xvi}:

-- It has caused me to:

-- Describe how it has convicted, blessed, or motivated you:

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- ⁱ Charles Spurgeon. Sermon - Memento Mori. March 18, 1860. (Adapted and Abridged)
- ⁱⁱ Christopher Bogosh & Joel Beeke, "Dying and Death: Getting Rightly Prepared for the Inevitable – Reformation Heritage Books (October 15, 2018). Pg 24-25.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Christopher Bogosh & Joel Beeke, "Dying and Death: Getting Rightly Prepared for the Inevitable – Reformation Heritage Books (October 15, 2018). Pg 24-25.
- ^{iv} Christopher Bogosh & Joel Beeke, "Dying and Death: Getting Rightly Prepared for the Inevitable – Reformation Heritage Books (October 15, 2018). Pg 24-25.
- ^v Dr Paul Ferguson. "Walking Through The Valley of the Shadow of Death" Cornerstone Church, Singapore. <https://cornerstonechurch.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Thru-The-Valley-1-Origin-of-Death.pdf> (Adapted)
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- ^{ix} Many of the notes in this section are abridged and adapted thoughts and comments derived from "Death" which is a book by Thomas Boston who was a puritan. In addition, some of the notes are abridged and adapted from numerous sermons on death by Charles Spurgeon.
- ^x James Smith. "One hour after death". (1859) (Adapted and Abridged)
- ^{xi} James Smith. "One hour after death". (1859) (Adapted and Abridged)
- ^{xii} James Smith. "One hour after death". (1859) (Adapted and Abridged)
- ^{xiii} James Smith. "One hour after death". (1859) (Adapted and Abridged)
- ^{xiv} Wyatt Graham. "Polycarp – Dying Well". CrippleGate. <https://thecripplegate.com/polycarp-dying-well/> (Adapted)
- ^{xv} Four Ways to Prepare for Death (from John's Owen's Glory of Christ)
- ^{xvi} R.C. Sproul. "Holiness of God – Study Guide". Copyright © 2014 Ligonier Ministries