

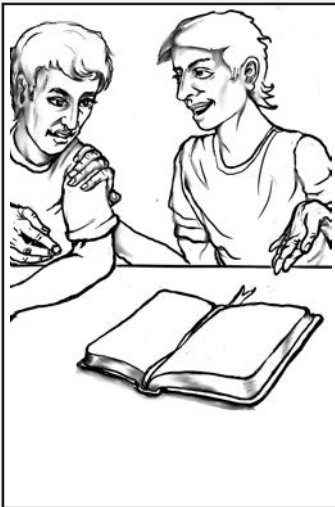
False Teachings



SABBATH—NOVEMBER 19

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Luke 16:19–31; Luke 23:43; Philippians 1:21–24; 1 Peter 3:13–20; Revelation 6:9–11.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘You carefully study the Scriptures [Old and New Testaments] because you think that they give you eternal [everlasting] life. Those are the same Scriptures that tell about me!’ ” (John 5:39, ICB).



When we study difficult verses, we should do what Jesus did. “Jesus always said what people needed to hear. But Jesus always shared the truth with them in love.”

PETER SAYS, “Always be ready to answer everyone who asks you to explain about the hope you have” (1 Peter 3:15, ERV). Paul adds, “Preach the Word of God [the Good News about Jesus]. Preach it when it [life] is easy and people want to listen and when it [life] is hard and people do not want to listen. Preach it [the Good News] all the time. Use the Word of God [the Bible] to show people they are wrong. Use the Word of God to help them do right. You must be willing to wait for people to understand what you teach as you teach them. The time will come when people will not listen to the truth. They will look for teachers who will tell them only what they want to hear” (2 Timothy 4:2, 3, NLV).

When we study difficult verses, we should do what Jesus did. “Jesus always said what people needed to hear. But Jesus always shared the truth with them in love. . . . Jesus was never mean. He never said a nasty word to anyone. Jesus never hurt anyone’s feelings on purpose. He didn’t make people feel bad for their mistakes.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 353, adapted. This week, we will study verses that people use to teach the false idea that a person’s spirit continues to live after he or she dies.

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS (Luke 16:19–31)

Read the picture story about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19–31. How do we know this story is not real? Why must we not use this story to explain what happens after we die?

Some Bible thinkers suggest that the picture story about the rich man and Lazarus is real. They say this story shows us what happens when someone dies. But this idea is different from Bible truth.

First, this story teaches us that heaven and hell are close enough to allow people in both places to talk with each other (Luke 16:23–31). This story also shows that a person's spirit continues to live after his body dies. The story shows that the dead person has real eyes, a finger, a tongue, and feels thirst.

If this Bible story shows us what happens after we die, then heaven can't be a place of joy and happiness. Not when the saved can closely watch the endless sufferings of their lost loved ones and talk to them (Luke 16:23–31). How can a mother be happy in heaven while she watches her beloved child suffer in hell? This idea is crazy! Also, how can God keep His promise to us that there will be no more tears or pain in heaven (Revelation 21:4)?

That's why many modern Bible thinkers believe that the story about the rich man and Lazarus is a picture story. So, not every part of the story is real. George E. Ladd is a Bible thinker who feels this way. He says that the rich man and Lazarus is "a picture story that shows us Jewish thinking about the rich and the poor. So, we should not think Jesus uses this story to teach us anything about what happens when we die."—G. E. Ladd, "Eschatology," in *The New Bible Dictionary*, edited by J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), page 388, adapted.

The picture story about the rich man and Lazarus shows us two men who are very different from each other. There is the rich man who wears expensive clothes. And there is a poor man named Lazarus whose body is covered with sores (Luke 16:19, 20). The story teaches us that (1) our riches in this life don't give us everlasting life. And (2) we decide to accept or reject everlasting life in this life. We can't change our minds after we die (Luke 16:25, 26).

Read Jesus' words in Luke 16:31. What does Jesus say about how much the Bible should control our lives?



The picture story about the rich man and Lazarus shows us two men who are very different from each other.

“ ‘TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE [HEAVEN]’ ” (Luke 23:43, ERV)



Jesus says to the thief on the cross, “ ‘I promise you, today you will be with me in paradise’ ” (Luke 23:43, ERV).

Many Bible thinkers use Luke 23:43 as proof that a person’s spirit continues to live after he or she dies. Jesus says to the thief on the cross, “ ‘I promise you, today you will be with me in paradise’ ” (Luke 23:43, ERV). This verse is written the same in almost every Bible. So, we may think that on the very day Jesus died, Jesus and the thief were together in heaven. But we must remember that many Bible translations are made by thinkers who believe in the false teaching that the spirit continues to live forever after death. So, is the translation of Luke 23:43 that we just read the best way to write this verse?

Compare Jesus’ promise to the thief on the cross in Luke 23:43 with Jesus’ promise to Mary Magdalene in John 20:17 and to His followers in John 14:1–3. How should we understand Jesus’ promise to the thief? How do Jesus’ promises to Mary and His followers help us answer this question?

Jesus’ words to Mary Magdalene show that Jesus hadn’t gone to see His Father in heaven (John 20:17). So, we can see that we shouldn’t think that Jesus and the thief went on the same day to heaven. Jesus also tells His followers that He will take them to heaven only at His Second Coming (John 14:1–3). So, these verses in John are more proof that Jesus didn’t go to heaven with the thief when they died.

What is the best way to write Luke 23:43 then? We should write the verse this way: “ ‘Today, I tell you, you will be with Me in Heaven, for sure.’ ” When we write the verse this way, we see that Jesus is making the promise to the thief on that day. Jesus promises the thief, right then and there, that he will be saved. Jesus is not saying the thief will be in heaven “today.” Jesus is saying “I promise you today that someday you will be with Me in heaven.”

Read the story about the thief that Jesus saves on the cross (Luke 23:39–43). The thief is a sinner. He has nothing to offer Jesus. And what does Jesus do? He offers everlasting life to this poor thief. How does this story show us that Jesus saves us when we believe in His mercy? Why should we remember that our good behavior does not save us?

TO LEAVE THIS LIFE AND BE WITH JESUS
(Philippians 1:21–24)

Read what Paul says in Philippians 1:21–24 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. When did Paul expect to “be with Christ [Jesus]” (Philippians 1:23, ERV)?

When Paul says, “I want to leave this life and be with Christ [Jesus]” (Philippians 1:23, ERV), what is he teaching us? Does Paul suggest that after he dies, he will go live with Jesus and that his spirit will continue to live? Of course not! In this verse, Paul talks about his wish to die because this life is full of troubles and suffering. So, Paul wants to be with Jesus. This verse does not teach that Paul expects to go to heaven as soon as he dies. Paul knows that he will not get everlasting life until the Second Coming (2 Timothy 4:8).

Paul also “says that the next thing he will know after dying will be the Second Coming. Jesus will come in the clouds of heaven. Jesus will wake up the dead. Then Paul will ‘be with the Lord’ (1 Thessalonians 4:17, ERV). We should understand that the Bible writers in Paul’s day often talk about death and everlasting life together.”—*Andrews Study Bible*, note on Philippians 1:23, page 1,555, adapted. What is Paul talking about in 2 Timothy 4? Paul’s death and the Second Coming, of course.

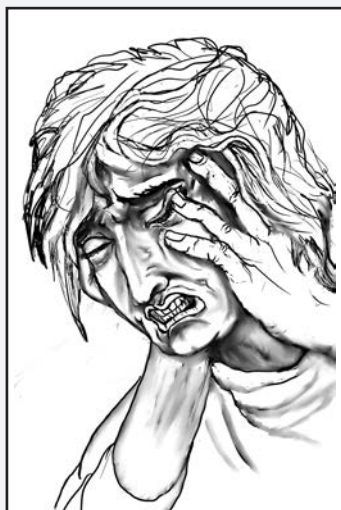
But why does Paul want to die? Paul wants to rest from all his troubles and the pain in his body. Also, Paul knows that he will get a crown someday from God. Paul says, “Now there is a crown waiting for me. It [this crown] is given to those who are right with God” (2 Timothy 4:6–8, NIV). For sure, Paul really didn’t want to die. Paul wanted to rest until Jesus woke him up from the dead.

When our life is hard, we often want to close our eyes in death. Nobody wants to suffer. Make a picture in your mind: you are sleeping. Then Jesus wakes you up! How does this wonderful Bible promise help us understand what Paul was saying in Philippians 1:21–24?



Paul knows that he will get a crown from God someday.

PREACHING TO THE SPIRITS IN PRISON
(1 Peter 3:13–20)



The words “in prison” are a word picture that shows us the prison of sin, not a real prison.

There is a strange story in 1 Peter 3. How did Jesus preach “to the spirits in prison . . . while Noah was building the big boat” (1 Peter 3:19, 20, ERV)? For the answer, read 1 Peter 3:13–20 and also Genesis 4:10.

Many modern Bible thinkers don’t understand 1 Peter 3:13–20. They think that the spirit continues to live on after the body dies. So, their false belief causes them to misunderstand what Peter says. They believe that Jesus visited hell after He died. There, Jesus preached to the spirits of the people who lived before the Flood.

This is a silly idea. We can’t accept it because the Bible teaches us that we don’t get any more chances to be saved after we die (Hebrews 9:27, 28). So, why would Jesus preach to people who have no chance to be saved?

This false idea about spirits in hell doesn’t match the Bible teaching that the dead stay dead in the grave until Jesus wakes them up (Job 14:10–12; Psalm 146:4; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10; 1 Corinthians 15:16–18; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–15).

Let’s pretend that Peter really meant that Jesus went down into hell while His body was dead in the grave. If Jesus did visit hell, why did Jesus preach only to the spirits who lived before the Flood? Were there no other people burning in hell who lived after the Flood that Jesus could preach to?

We shouldn’t believe that Peter is saying that Jesus preached to the fallen angels in Noah’s day. The Bible says that the “spirits in prison” didn’t obey God in the past (1 Peter 3:19, 20). This information doesn’t mean that the evil angels confessed their sins and became saved. The Bible says that the evil angels continue to disobey God today (Ephesians 6:12; 1 Peter 5:8). Jude tells us that “the Lord has kept these angels in darkness. They are bound [tied; locked in] with everlasting chains, to be judged on the great day [the day when God judges everyone]” (Jude 1:6, ICB). These evil angels have no chance to be saved.

We should understand that the “spirits in prison” (1 Peter 3:19) are “the people” (1 Peter 3:20, NLV) in Noah’s day that God was trying to save. The word written as “spirit” in 1 Peter 3:19 means living people who can learn and accept God’s offer to save them. The words “in prison” are a word picture that shows us the prison of sin, not a real prison (Romans 6:1–23; Romans 7:7–25). So then, how did Jesus preach to the people who lived before the Flood? Jesus preached to them in Noah’s words (2 Peter 2:5).

THE SPIRITS UNDER THE ALTAR (Revelation 6:9–11)

Read what John says in Revelation 6:9–11. What does John mean when he says that the spirits of dead Christians cry under the altar? How can the spirits of dead people cry if they already are dead and sleeping?

In Revelation 6, Jesus, the Lamb, opens the 5th lock on the roll of paper. This roll of paper shows God’s people what will happen to His church in the future. When the 5th lock is opened, something surprising happens. We see the spirits of Christians who were killed because of their faith. These spirits are under an altar. They cry to God to punish the people who killed them (Revelation 6:9–11). Some Bible thinkers believe that the altar is the same altar of burning perfume that we read about when the 7th lock is opened (Revelation 8:1–6). But the 5th lock shows us blood, not perfume, in Revelation 6:9–11 (read KJV or NKJV). So, we see that John talks about the altar of burnt offering. The blood of killed animal offerings was poured at the bottom of this altar (Leviticus 4:18, 30, 34). The blood of those offerings was poured around the altar. In the same way, the blood of the saints is poured at the bottom of God’s altar when God’s holy people are killed. They die because they are loyal to Jesus (Revelation 6:9; also read Revelation 12:17 and Revelation 14:12).

The spirits under the altar are a word picture, too. But what if we said they were not? What if we said they were real people? Then we must accept that these people aren’t enjoying life in heaven. Why? Because they continue to cry out to God to punish the ones who killed them. So, these people aren’t living a happy life in heaven.

Also, we must remember that God didn’t give John a view of heaven as it is. “There are no white, red, black, or light-colored horses in heaven with riders who are going to war. Jesus doesn’t appear in heaven as a real lamb with a bleeding knife cut. The four animals in Daniel aren’t real animals with wings. . . . In the same way, there are no ‘spirits’ of people lying at the bottom of an altar in heaven. The whole vision is a word picture filled with symbols that show us Bible truth about the end-times.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 7, page 778, adapted.

So, the dead spirits that John saw under the altar don’t show us what happens after we die. The dead spirits show us a picture story about Christians who were killed for their faith in God.



Jesus, the Lamb, opens the 5th lock on the roll of paper. This roll of paper shows God’s people what will happen to His church in the future.



“Some of these Christians were left in prison to die. They were hungry and cold.”

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “ ‘A Great Gulf Fixed,’ ” pages 260–271, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “Calvary,” pages 749–752, in *The Desire of Ages*; and “Teachers as Examples of Christian Integrity,” page 504, in *Fundamentals of Christian Education*.

“In the picture story about the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus shows us that in this life men decide to accept or reject God’s forgiveness. God offers forgiveness to every person during this life. But if men waste their time pleasing self, they will be cut off from everlasting life. God will not give them a second chance after they die. By their own choice, people separate fully from God so that God can’t save them.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 260, adapted.

“Many Christians in the past were sent to live alone in mountains and deserts. Some of these Christians were left in prison to die. They were hungry and cold. Their jailers hurt them. During these times, the Christians felt that dying was the only way to end their suffering. They were filled with joy at the thought that God chose them to suffer for Jesus. Jesus died for them. The examples of these Christians will comfort and encourage God’s people during the time of trouble. This time of trouble will be an experience that no one has known before.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 5, page 213, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① How can we understand the Bible verses we studied this week? How does sleep help us understand death and everlasting life?
- ② What things are worth dying for today? What can we learn from people who are willing to give up their lives for the wrong reasons?
- ③ Think some more about the rich man and the poor man named Lazarus. When Jesus woke up from the dead, many people believed He was the Savior. Other people saw the same proof. But their hearts were hard. So, these people didn’t believe. What can we do to protect ourselves from having hard hearts?

“RULE NUMBER 1: GOD FIRST!”

Modesty Kakula is a businessman in Namibia. He has a surprising way of sharing Jesus. He paints these words on all the rear windows of his three cars: “Rule Number 1: God First!”

Here’s the story behind these words. Modesty’s first boss offered to sell him a car for 50,000 Namibian dollars (that’s \$4,000.00 in U.S. money). Modesty worked hard and paid off all but 5,000 Namibian dollars (\$400.00 U.S. dollars) in four months. But Modesty’s boss changed the price just before Modesty paid off the amount he owed. Now his boss priced the car at 60,000 Namibian dollars. Modesty asked, “Why are you changing the price just now when I’m about to finish paying you for it?”

A few months later, Modesty paid his boss half of the money he owed. Now Modesty owed only 5,000 Namibian dollars. But Modesty’s boss changed the price again! This time, the boss raised the price to 70,000 Namibian dollars. Modesty tried to pay off the car again. To his surprise, his boss accused Modesty of not paying him anything at all. Then Modesty and his boss went to court. The judge decided in favor of Modesty. But the boss told the court, “Modesty will have to kill me first before I give him that car!” Modesty’s wife, Rebecca, asked to talk to the court. She was crying as she spoke. She said, “Let the boss keep the car. God will make a way for us.” The employer took the car and gave back to Modesty only 22,000 Namibian dollars. Then the boss fired Modesty from his job.

At home, Modesty, poured out his heart to God. He had no job and no income. As he prayed, the tears fell down his face. He knocked his Bible to the floor by accident. The Bible opened to the book of Romans. Modesty picked up the open Bible and read, “We know that in everything God works for the good of those [people] who love him. They are the people God called [chose], because that was his plan” (Romans 8:28, ICB).

“Wow!” Modesty said. Peace filled his heart.

The next day, Modesty got a phone call. A man he didn’t know offered to sell him a car for 23,000 Namibian dollars.

Modesty hurried to the man’s house. Sure enough, the man had a car for sale. Modesty asked the man to lower the price to 22,500 Namibian dollars. The man agreed. Modesty borrowed money from his parents to help pay for the car. Right away, Modesty painted the words: “Rule Number 1: God First!” on the rear window. Today, Modesty is a church leader and a business owner with three cars. Each of his three cars have the words “Rule Number 1: God First!” on the back window. Wherever his cars go, people point at them and say, “God first!”

INSIDE
Story
by OCRHAIN MATENGU



Each of his three cars have the words “Rule Number 1: God First!” on the back window.

