

The topic I'm dealing with on this destined-to-be-a-very-long thread seems to me to be particularly important. Most of my scholarship is of interest mainly to people concerned about the life and teachings of Jesus, the New Testament, the history of Christianity, and so on; but this is of interest to *all* of us. What happens when we die? Or more specifically, what happens to *me* when I die?

My current discussion of purgatory may be of little interest to people, until they think about it for a second. Do most people have to go through horrible suffering after death, even if they are not destined for the eternal flames of hell? I for one don't look forward to getting a tooth ache or ending up in the hospital. What if there are years, decades, centuries of physical torment ahead for me? Shouldn't I want to know about that and, well, make some preparations?

But it's a topic most of us don't think about. Those of us raised in a Protestant tradition simply don't buy it (whether we're Christian or not); many Catholics do buy it, but don't devote a lot of thought to it. But either way, is it true?

I have no way of knowing of course, so I'm not going to give you an answer. But I do want to pursue the question of where the idea came from. Is it taught, for example, in the New Testament? Supporters of the doctrine claim that it is, deniers say it isn't. What's the evidence?

I'll mention four passages that seem most relevant. Actually, the first I'll mention ...

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