

Have you experienced endless discussions on eschatology? I bet in all your discussions and debates, never once was the topic of the intermediate state mentioned; namely that is what happens one second after you die? That is strange because many older theological textbooks have death in the broader category of eschatology.

When Christians of all stripes of FINAL COSMIC eschatology talk about the final judgment, are they forgetting something that happens immediately after death? According to the 19th-century theologian William G.T. Shedd, they are!

Here is a quote from Shedd that I would love you to comment on.

According to scripture, there is a private judgment at death and a public judgment at the last day. The private judgment is proved by the following particulars. First, the Bible teaches that the human when it leaves, the body meets God directly, as it never has before, “the dust shall return to the Earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Ecc 12:7). This implies self-consciousness in the immediate presence of God, and this implies self knowledge in that presence, “now I know in part, but then shall I know, even as also I am known” (1 Cor 13:12 cf. Psalm 139:1-6). But this self-consciousness and self knowledge at death is a private individual judgment. Every man when he dies knows his moral character, and knows it accurately. Consequently, at death every man either a quit or condemn himself. What Saint Paul says is done in the public judgment of the last day is also done in the private judgment on the day of death. “The conscience bears witness and the thoughts accuse or else excuse one another” Romans chapter 2, verse 15.

Consequently, the private judgment at death indicates the moral state of the soul, “is it appointed unto men once to die, but after this, judgment” Heb 9:27. Second, the private judgment at death and the public judgment at the last day coincide, because in the intermediate state, there is no alteration of moral character, and consequently, no alteration of the sentence passed at death. William GT Shedd, Dogmatic Theology, page 878