

THE AUTHORITY & AUTHENTICITY OF NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

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(a) Common Assumptions — vs. — (b) Scriptural Testimony

1: a) Positive/affirming personal experiences tend to reassure people, regardless of whether or not they are true — especially in matters of faith.

b) According to Scripture: the truth is the truth, whether we may like it or not — especially in matters of faith.

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. (2 Timothy 4:1-4)

2: a) Many human beings seem to think that "experience" of life-after-death is more convincing than the promise of God, assuming that such "proof" creates faith.

b) According to Scripture, people are not allowed to return to life and report their experience to the living. God rests his assurance to us in his Word.

[The Rich Man] said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send [Lazarus] to my father's house — for I have five brothers — that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" (Luke 16:27-38)

3: a) Many people assume that supernatural visions ought to be believed simply because they are supernatural.

b) According to Scripture: Not all supernatural visions are true. Visions always are to be evaluated by the measure of God's Word.

Thus says the LORD of hosts: Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you; they are deluding you. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. (Jeremiah 23:16)

Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes, but have seen oracles for you that are false and misleading. (Lamentations 2:14)

4: a) People assume that visions of light and angels must be from God.

b) According to Scripture: The devil is capable of deceiving human beings with light and pleasing images. (note: the name "Lucifer" means "bearer of light," Isaiah 14:12)

Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness. Their end will match their deeds. (2 Corinthians 11:14)

5: a) Most people assume that all spiritual or supernatural experiences have a similar authenticity (as in: "all spiritual paths lead to the same place").

b) According to Scripture: not all "spiritual experiences" are from God, but only those that center in the truth of Jesus Christ.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world. (1 John 4:1-3)

6: a) Often "near-death" experiences (experienced by Christians and non-Christians) show visions of heaven that have no connection to Jesus whatsoever.

b) According to Scripture: Jesus is the only way to eternal life.

Jesus said to [Thomas], "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

7: a) Those who have had positive near-death experiences, often say that they no longer have a fear of death. This confidence is based on the "proven" existence of an afterlife, not necessarily on faith in Christ.

b) According to Scripture: There are cases where visions of the after-life have been granted by God within the context of faith in Christ; but such visions are no cause for eternal confidence (boasting). Only faith can give such confidence in the face of the fears and struggles of this world.

I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven — whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person — whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows — was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses ... So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:2-5, 9-10)

8: a) Many people assume that personal experience (including visions, dreams, etc.) is the only thing that can determine what they really ought to believe.

b) According to Scripture: True faith is trust in God, often despite experience. Experience is the test, not the proof, of faith.

If prophets or those who divine by dreams appear among you and promise you omens or portents, and the omens or the portents declared by them take place, and they say, "Let us follow other gods" (whom you have not known) "and let us serve them," you must not heed the words of those prophets or those who divine by dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you indeed love the LORD your God with all your heart and soul. The LORD your God you shall follow, him alone you shall fear, his commandments you shall keep, his voice you shall obey, him you shall serve, and to him you shall hold fast. (Deuteronomy 13:1-4)
