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Catechism: Lord's Day 22, Scripture illustration: 1 Corinthians 2:1-10 (vss. 9-10)

Introduction: To watch the evening news on television, one has to endure long commercials.

As the fall season began, I saw many commercials about the new or renewed television programs offered in this fall season.

It seems that many of the TV shows are about vampires 僵尸, or alien creatures.

What is it about vampires and aliens that many people of the world find so fascinating?

I think it is one thing, in particular: these creatures have special powers, and they never die. They are said to live forever.

There is something deep inside every person's soul, deep in the core of their being, which longs for eternal, everlasting, life. God has put this longing, this desire, within us.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 says this "God...has set eternity in the hearts of men 他使万事各按其时, 成为美好; 他又把永恒的意识放在人的心里。" [Repeat.

Indeed, when God created the first man and the first women, his design was that they should live forever. Forever, in that garden, enjoying their work, and enjoying close friendship with their God. For all eternity. You see, the desire for eternal life, everlasting life, is created within us. Put in us, by our Creator God.

"God **has set** eternity in the hearts of men." Death entered human history as an intruder 入侵者; as an invading enemy So says the Bible. Death was not part of God's original plan. Death invaded, as a result of sin. When sin and evil are taken away...then, and only then, there is no more death. Instead, we are given life, even eternal, everlasting life.

-And we experience that life, eternal life, in stages. So to speak.

1. The first stage of eternal, everlasting life, is **experienced in this present age.**

[Read John 3:36...present tense. Right now,...in this present age, on planet earth.

[John 5:24...present tense. A theme in the gospel of John.

John records Jesus' words more often about life... than the other 3 gospel writers, combined.

[John 6:54...present tense. [John 17:2-3, footnoted under Q. 58.

Biblically speaking, everyone who trusts in Jesus, is given eternal life, right now.

In the present moment. In what the Bible calls "this present evil age."

So eternal life is first of all a "quality of life," with Jesus as our Saviour, having atoned 赎罪 for our sins on the cross, and being raised up for our justification. Trusting in Jesus, we are filled with His Spirit, who is the Spirit of life, new life, everlasting life.

We as Christians have that everlasting life right now./

Yes, our physical bodies still will have to die (unless Jesus returns, first).

But our souls, our inner selves 内在的自我, never die. And from those souls, with our bodies, on this earth, we have passed from a "state of death" to a "state of life."

-So Q. 58 of our Catechism asks: "How does the article of the Creed, concerning life everlasting, comfort you? And the answer starts this way: "Even as I already now experience in my heart the beginning of eternal joy..." Already, now, in this present age, even with a body that still must die. Each of us as Christians is experiencing **the beginning** of "the joy" of eternal life.

2. But, eventually, if Jesus delays his return, our bodies must all die.

But even then, the death of our bodies does not take away our experience of eternal life.

Because our souls, our inner spirits, continue to live! Even after the death of our bodies.

So Jesus once stood at the tomb of his dear friend, Lazarus, who had just died.

And to his sister, Martha, Jesus said this: "I am the resurrection **and the life.** [The Life!]

He who believes in me will live though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die." We who trust in Jesus as our Saviour, never die. Never die, in the sense of complete death, going out of existence. So, though Lazarus died, he didn't fully die...

because his soul was still living. Jesus is our life, even when our bodies die.

-All Christians believe this...the holy, catholic church 圣洁大公的教会, has always taught this, even in the darkest days of man-made superstitions 迷信, which infiltrated the Roman church in Middle Ages 中世纪. Even then, the church still taught, the biblical belief in the life everlasting, for Christians.

Oh, that teaching was corrupted and distorted, and still is, by a teaching that immediately after death, the souls of Christians go to purgatory 炼狱. That in-between place of fire and burning and purging and cleansing. That the best Christians in their souls, stay in purgatory a shorter time.

And the worst Christians stay in purgatory a longer time. Even for thousands of years. That's not in the Bible.

When our bodies die...our souls go to be with Jesus. In heaven.

1) So Jesus said to that one thief, crucified on the one cross next to him.

When that man showed faith in Jesus, Jesus said: Today you will be with me in Paradise. In heaven. So, though Jesus body died, and was buried, so that man's body also died. Yet, Jesus in his soul, went to heaven, into the presence of His Father. And so did the soul of that believing man. That very day, at the time of death.

2) Listen to what the apostle Paul writes in Phil 1: 21f, about his own death. [Read 1:21-24.

To depart from the body, is to be with the Lord. No in-between state of purgatory. No imaginary sleeping of the soul, until the final resurrection, as the Seventh Day Adventists, and others teach. No. To depart from the body, is to be with the Lord....in heaven. In that place, he has prepared.

Many, many Bible verses likewise teach that the soul of the Christian believer, at the time of the death of the body, goes to heaven.

So we could call this **a second stage**, in our personal experience. The greater experience of the joy of eternal life. The first stage, remember, is our experience of eternal life, in our bodies, on this earth. Now.

But, at death, our bodies are left behind, so to speak, and our souls are completely purified and cleansed, of all sin and imperfection. So, actually, this will be a better experience of eternal life. It is a higher and better experience....

for we will then enter into a state of perfection, with God, in heaven.

Look back at Q. 56—"sinful nature" of Christians on earth, in the body...a sinful nature "which I need to struggle 挣扎着 against all my life." Each Christian on earth engages in a life-long struggle against the remnants 残余 of sin in us, as long as we are on earth. In this present evil age.

But at death, our bodies die and are buried. But our souls, in that moment, by a working of God's grace, and by His Spirit, are perfectly cleansed, purified. Only that which is perfectly holy can enter into the holy heaven. So the Holy Spirit, of the Holy Jesus, perfects us as we enter into the presence of our Holy, Heavenly Father. Ah, and then in heaven we exp even better joy of eternal life, than we could ever exp on earth./

The apostle Paul is referring to this as he is inspired to write 1 Corinthians chapter 2:7. [Read vs. 7.

God destined, predestined, our future, as Christians....that future is "for our glory." Our glorification.

Glorification. God, we say, lives in full glory...indicated by the bright shining of his light. A pure, dazzling, white light. Indicating, among other things, the complete absence of any sin, or the trace of any imperfection. So when Moses went up Mt. Sinai, he saw the bright glory of God. And his face radiated that glory, when he came down from the mountain. It was so intense, so bright, that for a time he had to wear a veil to cover his face. Else the people could not look at him. Too bright.

The full perfection of all God's attributes, the complete absence of any trace of sin or imperfection...it's all indicated by the shining brightness of the glory of God.

And, thus, that glory is fully revealed in heaven.

And that glory is destined for us....first, when we die, physically. As our souls are "glorified," perfected from any trace of sin...as Jesus work in us is fully and finally completed.

Then we enter into the full glory of heaven. Into the presence of God—F, S, HS. Then, says Paul:

we will experience what "no [human] eye has [ever] seen, or [human] ear has [ever] heard...no has [any human] mind conceived of...all what God has prepared for us, who love him."

Full glory... complete perfection...to then be as perfect as God is perfect. You? +

3. But there is more. You see, when our souls experience the fullness of eternal life, in heaven above, **our bodies are still in the grave**. On the earth below.

Our bodies are still held, in that sense, in the bondage of the consequences of sin.

Our bodies, dead and have returned to the dust.

But God has created both our bodies and our souls.

So God's work of glorification in us, through Jesus, is at that point, remains somewhat incomplete. While our bodies remain in the grave.

And that is why, in theological language, heaven is referred to as "the intermediate state 居间状态."

Intermediate. In-between. In the middle. The souls of Christians are indeed perfected, in heavenly glory. But we are still awaiting the resurrection of their bodies.

The perfecting and glorifying of our bodies.

And that happens, when Jesus comes back to earth. At Jesus' "second coming."

Remember, Jesus' **body** had been raised.

His human soul which left the body at death, had to be joined again.... To his raised up, perfected body. So that the complete Jesus, with both body and soul, would appear on the earth for 40 days. And the complete Jesus, would be lifted up, ascended into heaven.

The complete Jesus, with human body and human soul, would take his place at the Father's right hand. **So our bodies, like Jesus' body**, needs to be raised from the dead. Our souls, apart from the body, exist in heaven, in that in-between state. Yes, souls glorified...but our bodies awaiting Jesus' return to earth. Then what? I trust you know the Scriptures.

We're not spending much time now, on it.... [Read 1 Cor 15:20-23; then vs. 50-53.

That is the third and final stage of our experience of eternal life, everlasting life. Experienced in our newly raised up, resurrected bodies.

Bodies joined again to our souls, as God intended in the beginning, with Adam and Eve.

No more death of the body. But in our immortal, imperishable 不朽坏 bodies, we will experience the complete fullness of everlasting life.

So that our bodies will never, ever, fall into sickness or disease. Sickness and disease came to earth as a result of the first sin. Then, with resurrected bodies, no more sickness and disease.

And no more aging process, by which the cells in our body start to die the day we are born.

No more aging, or weakening, over the course of time.

One of our senior citizens in our church said to me some time ago....in my mind I still want....

But in my body...I just cannot. The body is getting too weak, too old.

In the new earth, when Jesus returns, when our bodies are raised...we enter into a whole new kind of world. We could say, time will be no more. According to St. Augustine, time is also created by God, when he created the world. Time, how do you know time? Well, it is the rotating of the earth around the sun. But in the new earth, we read in the book of Rev. there will be no sun. The glory of God and of the Lamb, gives us full, bright light.

We will be transported into a new reality, where there is no moving of an earth, no moving of a clock, no passing of days...for there will be no night there.

No passing of the days, no passing of weeks on the calendar. God has placed eternity in our hearts....and then, in the new earth, we will know eternity. One eternal day....of full glory and joy....to live before God. And to live with each other, forever.

I believe, you believe, we as Christians through the ages, confess together:

"I believe in the resurrection of the body, the life everlasting."

Conclusion: Stories and TV shows about vampires, or alien creatures.

These are all man-made stories...they are all fantasy. But they do lightly touch upon a truth...God's truth. The truth that our Creator God has made us as human beings to want to live forever. God has made us, as humans, not to die. But to live forever and ever.

So it shall be, for us, when Jesus comes again. **AMEN.**