

# Soul Sleep and the Intermediate State of the Dead

**Introduction:** For the purposes of this study and in contrasting the two views we will use the word soul to refer to the immaterial part of man as opposed to the body or material part of man. we believe man is tri-part in nature i.e. body, soul, and spirit. Therefore we do not regard "spirit" and "soul" as complete synonyms, but will use soul as the immaterial part of man primarily because this is the way it has historically been discussed. By way of definition, "the soul is the conscious immaterial essence of man comprising cognition and affections".

The table below outlines the progression of thought in the study. I would like to take some time and look at each section, not as a critique of soul sleep but from the historical or what I call biblical position.

| Section | Soul Sleep  | Historical View  |
|---------|---|--|
| I.      | The soul and body are inseparable                 | Soul and body are separate   |
| II.     | The soul is unconscious at death                  | The soul is conscious at death   |
| III.    | Eternal life and immortality are one and the same | Eternal life and immortality are referring to soul and body respectfully |

## 1) The Soul and Body are Separable Entities

- a) The body is dead when the Spirit/Soul leaves  
James 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead  
Luke 8:55 And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and he commanded to give her meat.  
Acts 7:59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. 60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.  
Luke 23:46 And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.  
Ecc 12:7 7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.
- b) Other scriptures relating to death  
Job 19: 25-27 Yet without my flesh I shall see God  
Matt 10:28 And fear not them, which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him, which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.  
Matt 17:3 Transfiguration mount (see below and cf Moses death Deut 34:5 & Elias death II Kings 2:11)  
II Cor 5:8 We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

## 2) The Soul is Conscious at Death

- a) Phil 1:21 -24. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor; yet what I shall choose, I know not. 23 For I am in a strait between the two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better; 24 nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.
  - i) The second coming of Christ is not in view here since Paul would not have mentioned staying with the Philippians and his strong desire for instantaneous reunion with Christ.

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Unless of course Paul was anticipating the return of Christ and he knew those saints weren't invited. That doesn't make sense.

- ii) What does it mean to be with Christ if I am sleeping or in an unconscious state?
- iii) If Paul did not mean that he would instantaneously be with Christ he would have used a different construction in grammar.
- iv) The phrase "with Christ" refers to the close and intimate relationship we have with Christ both positionally and ultimately personally. It refers to our co-extensive union and association with Christ. This is the only reference with that phrase where Paul speaks of his own desire for personal union with Christ. He alludes to it positionally and also as a firm promise in Romans 6:8 Now if we be **dead with Christ**, we believe that we shall also **live with Him**.
- v) Other references to the phrase "with Christ".
  - Romans 8:17 and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and **joint heirs with Christ**, if so it be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.
  - Galatians 2:20 I am **crucified with Christ**, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.
  - Ephesians 2:5 even when we were dead in sins, hath **quickened us together with Christ** (by grace ye are saved),
  - Philippians 1:23 For I am in a strait between the two, having a desire to **depart and to be with Christ**, which is far better;
  - Colossians 2:20 Therefore if ye be **dead with Christ** from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to its ordinances Colossians 3:1 If ye then be **risen with Christ**, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.
  - Colossians 3:3 For ye are dead, and your **life is hid with Christ** in God.
- b) I Thess 4:13-15 **13** But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. **14** For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. **15** For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. **16** For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: **17** Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. **18** Wherefore comfort one another with these words.
  - i) This passage clearly shows a distinction between the saints which are with Christ (v14) and the bodies they will receive (v 16) at his return. To be with Christ was promised in Rom 6:8 and what Paul was looking for (instantaneously at death) in Phil 1: 23. I suggest that this was exactly Paul's point here in comforting the Thessalonians with these words. Christ reunites the souls of those dead in him (those he brings with him) with their raised immortal bodies. Otherwise this text makes no sense to me.
  - ii) The dead saints are viewed as sleeping from the perspective of those still alive. That which sleeps refers only to the physical body as referenced by the word used for "dead" in v16. See Acts 7:60.

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- c) Luke 16:19-31
  - i) Names are mentioned, so it is not just a parable.
  - ii) All of Christ's parables and stories are based on facts.
  - iii) The beggar died and was carried. What was carried if this is not talking about his soul essence?
- d) Luke 23:42 -43 And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou come into thy kingdom.  
43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today thou shall be with me in paradise.
  - i) If the phrase read "Verily, verily I say unto you Today" it would be inconsistent with the way Christ used the expression.
  - ii) What does "Today thou shall thou be with me in paradise" mean if the soul sleeps after death.
  - iii) The word "Today" means this very day and cannot refer to some latter day in the future.
- e) II Cor 5:8-9 We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. 9 Therefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted by Him.
  - i) What does the phrase "to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord" mean if the soul sleeps at death?
  - ii) This passage is consistent with Phil 1: 23 and in fact compliments it. Paul is expressing his desire to be with Christ and absent from the body. Obviously to be present with the Lord (in a personal way) cannot happen until death. This is also referred to as the disembodied state.
  - iii) In v.9 we please Christ (to be accepted by him) whether in the body or absent (v8) from it. How can we do that which is acceptable to him if we're asleep? Again in context to say my soul is unconscious at death makes no sense.
- f) Matt 17:3-9 Transfiguration Mount
  - i) This was not a trance (check concordance of word) but an actual sight. The word "appeared" is never used of a trance.
  - ii) Moses and Elias talked with the Lord v3. Peter was in full capacity of his faculties by suggesting in v4 that he build a tabernacle for each of them.
  - iii) All three heard Gods blessing of his Son in v5 which followed immediately after Peters suggestion to build a tabernacle for each of them. This was a rebuke to Peter.
  - iv) In v8 after being touched by the Lord they saw no man except him.

### 3) Eternal Life And Immortality are not Synonymous Terms but Refer to the Soul and Body Respectively

- a) The Biblical meaning of death
  - i) General Scripture showing the various meanings of death
    - (1) Matt 5:22 Dead buries dead
    - (2) I Time 5:6 She is dead while she liveth
    - (3) John 5:25 Dead shall hear Christ's voice
  - ii) Death is:
    - (1) Separation James 2:26; Ecc 12:7
    - (2) Putting off a tent II Cor 5:1; II Peter 1:13,14
    - (3) Exodus Luke 9:30,31; II Peter 1:15
    - (4) Absence from the body II Co 5:8, 12:2
    - (5) State of silence Ps 31:17; 115:17
    - (6) Penalty for sin Gen 2:17, Exek 18:4; Rom 6:23; James 1:14-15; Rom 8:6,13

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- iii) Spiritual Death (of the natural fleshly man)
  - (1) Natural state of man Eph 2:1-3
  - (2) Separation of the spiritual nature of man from the life of God Eph 4:18; I Co 2:11
  - (3) The natural man is dead and is enmity against God Rom 8:7,8
  - (4) At death without Christ Ps 73:16-20; Job 20:25-26
- iv) Spiritual death as it relates to believers Rom 6:11,13; 8:6,13; Eph 5:14; Col 2:13
- b) Eternal Life is Different than Immortality
  - i) Eternal life is a vital union with Christ at regeneration, which **NEVER** ceases.
    - (1) The relationship between regeneration and indwelling. (Please let me know if you want more details in this area)
      - (a) Regeneration is the work of God's Spirit whereby he quickens alive man's dead spirit, according to the eternal purpose of God and redemptive work of Jesus Christ, producing spiritual life, and all that goes with that life namely; faith, repentance, illumination of understanding, conviction of sin, desire for holiness, knowledge and love of God, and of Christ etc. No man can exhibit the characteristics of spiritual life while in his dead fleshly state.
      - (b) Regeneration is more than just a restoration to Adam's pre-fall state. Regeneration is to a newer and higher state in the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). Lost sinners need more than just restoration. The spirit is not added or replaced at regeneration but changed. The spirit substance or essence is changed which makes man in his spirit and spirit life "A new man who after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:29). Man has a material and an immaterial nature. The material nature refers to his flesh, bones, blood etc.. His immaterial nature is composed of two parts, his soul and spirit. Prior to regeneration the soul dominates the man; the spirit is almost indistinguishable from the soul. The man is soulish or fleshly in all of his deeds and thoughts. The soul reigns in the man with all its fleshly desires as an absolute monarch. When God regenerates, it's the spirit that is quickened alive in the image of Christ. The soul loses its reigning power but not its influence over the man. The spirit is now clearly defined (at regeneration) apart from the soul and reigns in the life of the saint (Heb. 4:12). At death the **soul** is quickened alive (I Thess. 5:23), and at the resurrection the **body** is quickened alive to the glory of God (I Cor. 15:42-54; Phil. 3:21).
      - (c) The relationship of regeneration to indwelling:
        - (i) Regeneration is the mechanism (or vehicle) by which God indwells and has communion with his people. God regenerates no one he doesn't indwell; in fact God regenerates to indwell. We can therefore say that regeneration and indwelling are complimentary concepts but viewed from different perspectives. God desires to be in communion with his people, but before there can be communion there must be a change in the dead spirit of man. There are two things that are fundamental to our consideration of this topic; things must be in agreement before they can work together and there must be a likeness of essence before there can be a union.
        - (ii) We can't have communion with God until we are in union with him.
        - (iii) We can't be in union with God until our spirit essences are like his Spirit. God indwells through the Holy Spirit by means of power manifested in the new nature.

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- ii) Eternal life, given us by God is in Christ.  
I John 5:11-13 And this is the record: that God hath given to us eternal life, and **this life is in His Son**. 12 He that **hath the Son hath life**, and he that hath not the Son hath not life. 13 These things I have written unto you that believe in the name of the Son of God, that ye may **know that ye have eternal life**, and that ye may believe in the name of the Son of God.
- iii) Eternal life and immortality are given divine distinction  
II Tim 1:10 but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death and hath brought **life** and **immortality** to light through the Gospel.  
Rom 2:7 To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and **immortality, eternal life:**  
John 6: 39-40 And this is the Father's will who hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the Last Day. And this is the will of Him that sent Me: that every one who seeth the Son and believeth in Him may **have everlasting life**, and I **will raise him up** at the Last Day."  
John 6:54 Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood **hath eternal life**, and I will **raise him up** at the Last Day.
- iv) Christ alone has immortality (I Tim 6:16) but will give it to his elect at his return  
I Co 15:51,54; Phil 3:21; I Thess 4:13-18
- v) Christ gives eternal life to his people in this life  
John 10:28 And I give unto them eternal life, and **they shall never perish**, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.  
John 17:2 as Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him.  
Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
I John 5:11,13 See context. This is given at regeneration. Eternal life is in the present tense and in present possession of every believer.
- vi) Eternal life is based on God's promises Titus 1:2; I John 2:25
- vii) Our life is based on His life  
John 14:19 because I live, ye shall live
- viii) Eternal life is viewed as a present possession of believers and is unending in duration  
John 5:24 Verily, verily I say unto you, he that heareth My Word and believeth in Him that sent Me, **hath everlasting life** and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.  
John 6: 47 -51 Verily, verily I say unto you, He that believeth in Me **hath everlasting life**. I am that Bread of Life. 49 Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and are dead. 50 This is the Bread which cometh down from Heaven, that a man may eat thereof and **not die**. 51 I am the living Bread which came down from Heaven. If any man eat of this Bread, he shall **live for ever**; and the Bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."  
John 6:57-58 As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth Me, even he **shall live by Me**. This is that Bread which came down from Heaven, not as your fathers ate manna and are dead; he that eateth of this Bread **shall live for ever**."  
(1) As Christ lives by the Father so we live by Christ. What we say about the one affects the other. If I am separated from God at death does that mean Christ can be separated from the Father?

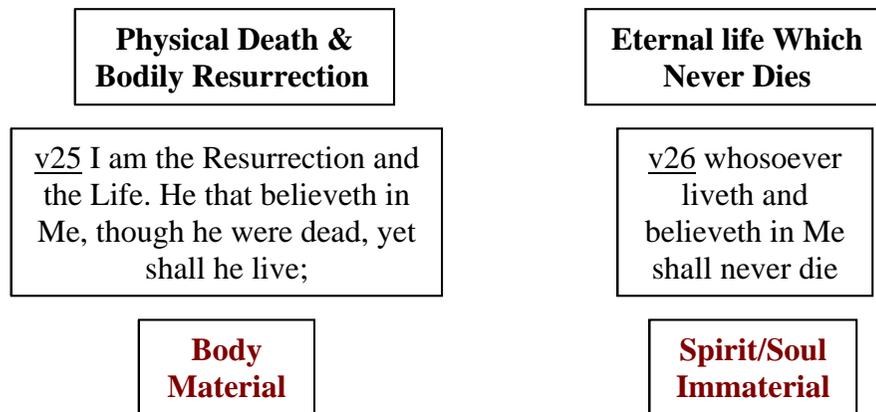
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(2) Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ (Rom 8:35-39). Being unconscious at death is a separation from God and is not consistent with these truths.

c) The Lord comforts Martha

John 11:22-27 Then Martha said unto Jesus, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But I know that even now, whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee." 23 Jesus said unto her, "Thy brother shall rise again." 24 Martha said unto Him, "I know that he shall rise again at the resurrection on the Last Day." 25 Jesus said unto her, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; 26 and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?" 27 She said unto Him, "Yea, Lord, I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, who should come into the world."

i) Martha did believe in the resurrection but had no clue as to the reality of eternal life.



ix) Christ's purpose was to comfort Martha, in that when the Prince of Life gives life to a believer it is unaffected by **physical death**.

c) What is eternal life?

John 17:2-3 Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He **should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him**. 3 And **this is life eternal: that they might know Thee**, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.

i) I have eternal life.

ii) That part of me which has eternal life will never die.

iii) The essence of that eternal life is a personal saving knowledge of the true God and the Son.

iv) Therefore that part of me in eternal vital union with Christ will never die or be separated from Christ and I will enjoy that fellowship and personal relationship with my savior while absent from the body in his presence.

Rom 8:9-11 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. 10 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.