

DEATH AND AFTER

False Teaching of Soul Sleep

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. A Christian in the 20th century must have a good understanding of the intermediate state because cultists are swarming with their false teachings about death. By the intermediate state is meant “that realm or condition in which souls exist between death and the resurrection.”
- B. Modern cultists are just a continuation of heretics who have been condemned by the Church for 2,000 years. It is important that we can spot heresy (false teaching) and refute it.

II. SOUL SLEEP

- A. Definition: The advocates of soul sleep maintain that, after physical death, the soul continues to exist as an individual being, but in a state of unconscious repose. According to this doctrine the souls of the dead are sleeping in the grave, that is, in a silent world in which there is no knowledge, consciousness or activity. The soul is in a state of non-existence. The soul and body are not raised until the final judgment at which times the souls are recreated or restored and then the wicked and righteous are judged (Jn. 5:28, 29).
- B. Advocates: The doctrine of the sleep of the soul seems to have a peculiar fascination for those who find it hard to believe in a continuance of consciousness apart from the body. In early church history this doctrine was held by a sect in Arabia called the Psychopannychia. At the time of the Reformation, some Anabaptists held to soul sleep. In the 19th century some Irvingites in England held this view. Today it is openly propagated by the Jehovah Witnesses, Christian Scientists, Seventh Day Adventists, the Christian Advent Church, etc. Probably the most ardent proponent is Herbert W. Armstrong. Soul sleep might also be propagated in one form or another by modern day Christian liberals. NOTE: The historic church has consistently rejected any form of soul sleep and it has just been recently that it has received any great following.
- C. Support: Men who hold to false teaching usually find support for it from the Bible, for the Bible can be made to support anything if a person or group does not consider all the verses on a subject.
 1. The Bible Uses the Word “Sleep”: Sleep is taught in the Old Testament to refer to physical death (Deut. 31:16; I Kgs. 22:50) and also in the New Testament (Jn. 11:11; Acts 7:60; I Cor. 15:6, 20; I Thess. 4:13, 14). There is one reference in the Old Testament to show that “sleep” refers to the physical death of both saved and unsaved (Dan. 12:2). POINT: A man’s soul and body both sleep after death in an unconscious existence.
OBJECTIONS:
 - a. The Greek word for sleep, komiao, means to lie down. The Greek word for “resurrection” means to stand up. Both of these words refer to the physical body and not to the soul of a human being.

- b. When the Bible speaks of death as sleep, this is the language of appearance. It describes a person only as he appears from the human viewpoint, not as he really is. "In every instance in which the word sleep is used in connection with the dead, the context makes it clear that it applies only to the body" (Beottner, Immortality).
2. The Bible Seems to Teach that the Souls of Men Die: At first glance it appears that souls may die (Josh. 10:35; Psa. 33:19; 78:50; Ezk. 18:4; James 5:20; Rev. 16:3). **OBJECTIONS**: In each of these cases, the word "soul" may refer to the principle of life or to an individual person. Sometimes the word "death" when it is used with "soul" refers to spiritual death and not physical death.
3. The Bible Teaches Men are Unconscious After Death: Some passages seem to teach, especially in the Old Testament; that men are unconscious at death (Eccl. 9:5, 6, 10; Psa. 5:5; Psa. 115:17; Isa. 38:18, 19). **OBJECTIONS**:
- Again this is appearance language, being viewed from the perspective of the writer as he views death from a human viewpoint.
 - Some passages in the Old Testament seem to teach that there was conversation after death (Ezk. 32:21; Isa. 14:9-11) and Old Testament saints expected to go into the presence of the Lord (Psa. 17:15; 73:24; Prov. 14:32).
 - The Bible presents believers enjoying a conscious life in communion with Christ immediately after death (Lk. 16:19-31; 23:43; Acts 7:59; II Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; Rev. 6:9; 7:9).
 - In Luke 16:19-31 it says the rich man could speak, feel pain, drink and had memory. He was fully conscious in Hades, and there is no evidence of soul sleep.

D. Scriptural Refutations of Soul Sleep

- Matt. 17:1-3: Moses and Elijah who died hundreds of years before, came back through a miracle and talked with Jesus Christ. Moses and Elijah were not soul sleeping.
- Luke 23:43: Christ promised the thief that he would be in Paradise with him that very day. The thief's body went into the grave but his soul and spirit (immaterial part) went into the presence of God.
- John 11:26: Christ promised that a Christian shall never die spiritually. If the believer has to go through soul sleep, then Christ lied. That part of man that can never die is soul and spirit.
- Matt. 22: 31, 32: God is not the God of the dead but the living. He must be the God of all who have died in Christ and thus speaks of the "living" in terms of believers who are living physically or who have died and their souls and spirits are alive in His presence.
- II Cor. 5:6, 8: The Bible teaches to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. This must refer to the soul and spirit of a believer. What reward would it be if the soul and spirit could not fellowship with Christ immediately?
- Phil. 1:21-23: To die is to be in the presence of Christ. The body dies but the soul and spirit goes to be with Christ.
- Acts 7:59: Stephen asked the Lord to receive his human spirit. He did not expect his human spirit to die and fall asleep.

8. Heb. 12:23: This refers to the Old Testament saints who have been given a position in the New Jerusalem. This certainly implies the conscious existence of their souls.
9. Rev. 6:9, 10: Tribulation saints who died are beseeching the Lord for vengeance. Their souls were not sleeping.
10. Rev. 7:9, 10: Tribulation converts praised the Lord after death. They were very much conscious.

E. Logical Refutation of Soul Sleep

1. Souls are Created: Souls are created by God (Gen. 2:7) – “man became a living being (soul).” The immaterial part of man was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). This would include the soul and because God is eternal the human soul is eternal, and cannot die physically like the body.
2. Souls are Separated from the Body: Those who teach soul sleep are confusing what is said of the body with what is said of the soul. Death is not extinction but only the separation of the soul from the body. The soul continues to exist, fully conscious and active, and at the resurrection this same soul, not a new one, is reunited with the body.
3. Illogic of Soul Sleep: First, how can a non-existent person be brought back into existence unless God does a recreation? The “recreation” took place at the new birth (II Cor. 5:17) where man’s total being, including his soul, was spiritually redeemed and made fit for heaven. Secondly, in what sense would a person be the same person who formerly lived? Thirdly, why should non-existent sinners be brought back into existence at all? Or why should they be brought back into existence only for the purpose of putting them out of existence a second time?

III. CONCLUSIONS

- A. The scriptural evidence when taken as a whole most certainly favors a conscious existence of all souls of all men, saved and unsaved, after death. While soul sleep is an obvious diversion from the Bible, it is only a heresy in the narrowest sense. A person could be saved and hold to the doctrine of soul sleep, but it would weaken one’s viewpoint of the anticipation of death and may open the door to real heresies such as annihilation (eternal state of unconsciousness for the unsaved).
- B. Historically, the Church has spoken out against the teaching of soul sleep. In the Forty-Two Articles of Edward VI, which preceded the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, the statement is made:

“They which say that the souls of those who depart hence do sleep being without all sense, feeling or perceiving till the Day of Judgment, do utterly dissent from the right belief disclosed to us in Holy Scripture.”

- C. For the sake of argument, let us assume that soul sleep is correct. Remember I reject soul sleep as Biblical. This doctrine does not destroy all anticipation of death. When one dies, he loses all consciousness but his next conscious moment will be in the presence of Christ. Soul sleep would be like real sleep. When one falls to sleep at night, he loses all sense of consciousness. During that time a person loses all track of time. A period of ten minutes, ten hours, or ten decades would pass during that time of unconsciousness. However, when one wakes up he is totally conscious.