

Becky Bereans – Death and Resurrection – Session 3

Session 3

Review

Last time, we looked at the concept of mankind being composed of three components – body, soul, and spirit. We saw that just as God Himself is triune, we who are created in His image are three in one as well. We spoke of the body as our interface with the physical universe – receiving information from our senses, and implementing effects on the universe by our actions. We spent most of that session focused on our soul – the core of our being, the root of our sense of self, and the seat of our thoughts and emotions. Finally, we looked at our spirit, noting that when God first created mankind the spirits of Adam and Eve were in perfect communion with God’s Holy Spirit. But when sin and death entered the world through their rebellion, our spirits became separated from God by the barrier of our sin. In this fallen state, our spirits cannot commune with God’s Spirit until He Himself comes to dwell in us, and regenerates our spirits into the connection between our souls and God as our spirits were originally intended to be.

Can We Believe in Immortality?

Well, DUH! As Dr. Strauss points out in this chapter, every society in history has believed in some form of continuing life after bodily death.

Interestingly, all five instances of the term “immortality” found in God’s Word are in the Pauline epistles. Paul uses two Greek words that are rendered as immortality in these five instances...

ἀφθαρσία *aphtharsia* – meaning incorruptibility, unending existence

ἀθανασία *athanasia* – meaning undying, immortality, everlasting

Interestingly, we find them both in 1 Corinthians 15:54...

*When the perishable puts on the imperishable [ἀφθαρσία *aphtharsia*], and the mortal puts on immortality [ἀθανασία *athanasia*], then shall come to pass the saying that is written:*

“Death is swallowed up in victory”.¹ 1 Corinthians 15:54 [ESV]

We know from our previous discussions that the corruptible nature of our human body, and its ultimate death are an inevitable part of life brought about when mankind first rebelled against God’s commandment in the Garden of Eden. We know the death of our body is inescapable. Paul put it quite succinctly...

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, Hebrews 9:27 [ESV]

Yet Jesus clearly made a distinction between this inevitable bodily death and the death of our eternal souls...

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Matthew 10:28 [ESV]

As with all Bible study, context is critical. In this case, the occasion was when Jesus sent out His disciples to minister and preach the Good News of His coming among the Samaritan Gentiles. He warned them that they would be persecuted for this just as He Himself was, but He told them not to fear this persecution because people have no power on Earth to destroy our souls. Given that context,

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we need to be careful about drawing any broader general principles from Jesus' encouragement in verse 28. But clearly, Jesus taught that the soul continues following the death of the body.

Furthermore, Jesus clearly taught of a bodily resurrection as well...

39This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. 40And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day. John

6:39-40 [NKJV]

Of course, not only did Jesus *teach* the truth of our eventual bodily resurrection with His *words*, but He also demonstrated it through His own resurrection. We know clearly from scripture that the resurrected Jesus was not the disembodied Spirit of God, but had a glorified resurrection body. Consider for example Jesus encouraging Thomas to physically touch the crucifixion wounds in His side and hands (John 20). Also, recall that the risen Jesus expressed hunger to His disciples when He appeared to them, and shared food with them (e.g. Luke 24). The transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain (Matthew 17) and the various appearances of Jesus in bodily form prior to His incarnation at Bethlehem (e.g. Joshua 5) also bear witness that Jesus has some sort of eternal bodily form or at least He can assume such a form on demand.

But if we look closely at Jesus' promise to raise us up at the last day, we find it applies only to those whom the Father has given to the LORD Jesus. Clearly then, the form of our eternal life – body, soul, and spirit – and the manner and timing of our bodily resurrection are different for Jesus followers than they are for non-believers. But the burning questions in the hearts of most people are exactly how and when our full restoration into eternal life – body, soul, and spirit will take place, and exactly how the eternal life of the Gospel believer differs from that of the unredeemed.

Dr. Strauss writes about three kinds of death, and that short paragraph is worth reading together...

The Bible teaches that there are three kinds of death and it distinguishes clearly between each. First, there is physical death, or the separation of the soul from the body. This is the death of the body to which reference was made in Hebrews 9:27, "It is appointed unto men once to die." Second, the Bible teaches that there is a spiritual death. This is the separator of the soul from God, the condition of all unbelievers of whom Paul says they are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1), and "alienated from the life of God" (Ephesians 4:18). Third, there is eternal death or banishment from God. All who suffer eternal death are conscious, but "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (2 Thessalonians 1:9), these "have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8).

ASIDE – Regarding Soul Sleep

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Before this paragraph, Dr. Strauss had just finished a short condemnation of the concept of “soul sleep,” stating flatly that those who promulgate this idea do so by misinterpretation of various scriptures. Unfortunately, Dr. Strauss doesn’t elaborate the exact nature of this misinterpretation, which frankly makes me suspicious. It reminds me of a Physics instructor I had early on in my college career. When questioned about some aspect of the equations he had written on the blackboard (Yes. It was *that* long ago), he would often say, “Can’t you see that? It’s intuitively obvious to the most casual observer!” We students referred to this as “Proof by Intimidation.”

Sadly, we find this manner of “proof” throughout academic endeavors including Biblical exposition. Therefore, when Bible teachers just say, “The Bible says...” without giving the specific Scripture within its proper context, or when people (even eminent Bible scholars like Dr. Strauss) say, “That’s a false doctrine based on misinterpretation of Scripture,” without expounding any further, it makes the entire exposition suspect to my way of thinking, and fills me with the desire to search the Scriptures for myself to find out whether what they are saying is true.

So, what about “soul sleep” then? Certainly, those who advocate this position didn’t simply make it up out of whole cloth. They must have had some sort of Biblical basis – even possibly a flimsy one – for espousing this idea. So, I went searching for information about the Scriptures people use to justify the idea. I was excited to find that [Dr. J. Vernon McGee](#) – one of my “go-to” Bible expositors once answered a question about soul sleep from a listener to his radio program – [Thru the Bible](#). I was particularly excited to hear that the listener had mentioned the Parable of the Rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:18-31) in the question, because it was that parable which first led us to this series of discussions about Death and Resurrection. But when I listened to Dr. McGee’s [answer](#), I was disappointed to find that he had simply denied the idea of soul sleep, and devoted much of his answer to talking about the mortality of our physical bodies. He went on to talk about misinterpretation and mistranslation being at the root of the idea of soul sleep without going into any details about the relevant Scriptures, just as Dr. Strauss had.

But I’m happy to report that I eventually found someone on the Internet – Brother Mark – who runs a website called [A Matter of Truth](#), and is apparently even more enamored of seeing his own words in print than I am. One of the articles on Brother Mark’s website takes up the subject of [Scriptures Used to Support the Doctrine of Soul Sleep](#) at great length – VERY great length. To be perfectly honest, I didn’t have time while preparing for this evening’s discussion to thoroughly examine all that Brother Mark had to say on the subject, so the Biblical verification of Brother Mark’s exposition must be... as the lazy college textbook writers like to say, “... left as an exercise for the student.” I did find some things in Brother Mark’s exposition that I felt worthy of quoting, though. First, he gave a succinct description of the idea of soul sleep in its various forms.

NOTE – Brother Mark does not subscribe to the idea of soul sleep. He is simply reporting the facts about the idea with adequate scriptural cross references to enable his readers to make informed Biblically sound conclusions about it on their own. This I find quite admirable – if somewhat long-winded.

There are basically three types of soul sleep.

#1. Annihilation of the soul.

Teaches that when the physical body dies the spirit goes back to God and the soul ceases to exist.

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This is called extreme soul sleep and it is taught by the Jehovah's Witnesses, who say that God creates a new soul and a new immortal body for the righteous in Jesus Christ only at the resurrection. The wicked are raised in the old mortal bodies and given their new soul and then both body and soul of the wicked are destroyed in the lake of fire.

#2. Unconscious soul sleep.

Teaches that when the physical body dies the spirit goes back to God "temporarily" and the soul sleeps stay [SIC] with the decaying body in the grave in an unconscious state until the resurrection when God's spirit "reenters" the old resurrected body and the old resurrected body of the righteous in Jesus Christ only puts on a new immortal spiritual body. The wicked remain in their resurrected mortal body and are cast into the lake of fire alive where both the soul and body of the wicked only are destroyed and then the spirit returns to God for the final time.

#3. General soul sleep.

Teaches that when the physical body dies the soul and spirit of the righteous IN Jesus Christ goes to heaven to be present with the Lord where they are given white robes of righteous to wear lest they be found naked. These souls are under the altar of God awaiting till their brethren be killed as they were and all be fulfilled so that God can avenge their blood at the coming of Jesus at which time only the righteous in Jesus will be changed from mortal to immortal.

When the wicked die their soul and spirit goes to Sheol, the holding place for the dead in the heart of the earth.

This general type of soul sleep is taught by the vast majority of Christians who prefer to NOT call this teaching by the title "soul sleep" so as to not be confused with the other doctrines of soul sleep.

Before we move on, I wanted to share [something else Brother Mark had to say about soul sleep](#) that is without any doubt whatsoever absolutely true...

No matter what you conclude it has no bearing on whether or not a person is saved. Christians who sincerely believe that the soul sleeps in an unconscious state in the grave until the resurrection are saved just the same as Christians who believe that the doctrine of soul sleep contradicts many verses in the Bible.

Putting aside for the moment this idea of soul sleep, let's quickly look at the rest of Dr. Strauss' exposition in this chapter before we launch into our discussions. First, recall Dr. Strauss' blunt conjecture in the previous chapter that we cannot properly understand the Biblical concepts of immortality, and resurrection without first recognizing that people are made up of three distinct

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aspects – body, soul, and spirit – which are somehow merged together into our complete being. In considering our eternal nature, it is helpful – even necessary – to consider these three aspects separately.

Dr. Strauss makes a helpful distinction between immortality and eternal life. In fact, we were all created by God as immortal beings in all three of our triune aspects. But not everyone will inherit eternal life per se. As we have already seen, when the first people – Adam and Eve – rebelled against God’s commandment in the Garden of Eden, they brought the curse of bodily death upon us all. Thus **everyone** – Christian and unbeliever alike – will face the certainty of bodily death with the notable exception of those Christians who are living at the time of Jesus’ return to gather His church (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Furthermore, when we took up the discussion of mankind as a trinity, we found that when sin first entered into Creation, our spirits also suffered the curse of death – being separated from the Spirit of God for all eternity unless they are regenerated through the indwelling of God’s Holy Spirit through faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In fact, **all** of us were born with eternal but dead spirits. The resurrection of our spirits has **already** occurred for those who are born again of God’s Spirit, and will **never** occur for those who are not.

NOTE – It is clear from various scriptures that many Israelites and even some Gentiles (e.g., Nebuchadnezzar) were faithful believers and followers of the one true and living God. But the exact nature and timing of their spiritual regeneration remains a mystery – at least to me.

CAVEAT – Much of the following discussion is subject to debate, based on differing interpretations of God’s Word. Also, since we will devote an entire session to discussing the details and timing of bodily resurrection, we will delay discussing them for now.

The idea of soul sleep notwithstanding and without going into any of the scriptural details (do as I say, not as I do), for the sake of time let me just summarize what I believe God’s Word makes clear concerning the eternal life of our three components. First, I will simply state bluntly that our souls were created with eternal life which they will never forfeit. At physical death, our souls are separated from our bodies and remain so until our souls are reunited with resurrected bodies. Those whose spirits have been regenerated into communion with God’s Spirit will enjoy eternal life in the presence of His glory. For the believer, it is clear that our souls and spirits will be present with God in a state that Jesus referred to as Abraham’s bosom and Paradise (see Luke 16:18-31 & 23:43) during the time between our bodily death and our bodily resurrection. On the other hand, the eternal souls of those whose spirits remained dead during their earthly lifetimes, without ever being regenerated by God’s Spirit, will also be separated from their bodies at physical death, but they will languish in torment apart from God in a state known in the Old Testament as Sheol – שְׁאוֹל *š’ol* and in the New Testament as Hades – ᾗδης *hades*.

NOTE – Both of these “holding areas” for the souls of those whose bodies have died are also known as “death” and “the grave.” Abraham’s bosom is not the same as our eternal final state in Heaven with God. Likewise Sheol and Hades are not the same as the place/state of eternal torment called “Hell” by Jesus in Matthew 10:28. That Greek word is γέεννα *geenna* – a transliteration of the Hebrew name for the valley in Jerusalem where the garbage and carcasses of dead animals were burned continually.

At the Great White Throne, the souls of unbelievers will also be reunited with resurrection bodies, but will then be cast together into the lake of fire where they will suffer eternal torment separated from God – the consequence of their inborn dead spirits never having been regenerated into eternal life by God’s Spirit.

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Discussion Questions

1. What was the most important difference between the Pharisees and the Sadducees of Jesus' time?
A – The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection from the dead, so they were very sad. You see?
2. Is our soul eternally melded with our selves and our spirits, or is its life and death tied to our physical body?
3. Must our physical body be preserved intact in order for God to resurrect it?
4. Does Dr. Strauss' exposition about the life, death, and resurrection of our three components make sense to you? If not, why not?
5. What are your beliefs regarding "soul sleep?" What is your Biblical basis for them?
6. How/when do/did the spirits of those Old Testament faithful like Abraham, Moses, and Elijah who died prior to Jesus' incarnation and the pouring out of God's Spirit at the first Pentecost following His ascension get regenerated?
7. We clearly see from the story of Jesus' transfiguration (Matthew 17 and Mark 19) that Moses and Elijah have already undergone at least a temporary bodily resurrection. How/when? What about Abraham, Lazarus, and the rich man?
8. Assuming Dr. Strauss and I are fuller of crap than the proverbial Christmas goose in our exposition of the Biblical teaching on immortality, eternal life, and resurrection, what are your ideas on the subject and your Biblical bases for them?