

## SOUL SLEEP

Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D.

*Excerpt from Apples of Gold*

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.” Proverbs 25:11

---

To understand and deal with the erroneous concept of “soul sleep” we must first come to terms with a few basic biblical concepts. Scripture clearly teaches that man is a tripartite being – meaning we are composed of three parts – spirit, soul, and body (1 Thes. 5:23; Heb.4:12). As everyone knows what is meant by the body, there is no need to elaborate on this. Now the soul includes an individual’s will, psyche, emotions, intellect, and ego. Thus, it should be obvious that the seat of the soul is the mind. Moreover, the soul is the you I can know and the me you can know. It’s the real us: our character and personality.

On the other hand, the spirit of man is far deeper than the soul. It is that part of us that can actually make contact with God. With the soul man can contemplate God, think about God, and talk about God, but the will, psyche, emotions, intellect, and ego cannot worship and love Him. When Adam ate of the forbidden tree he experienced “spiritual” death (“for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,” Gen. 2:17). His body wasn’t dead yet, but he began aging and thus began physically dying. Whereas beforehand he had open communication and fellowship with the Lord, the rebellion against God’s one stipulation severed the “direct telephone line” to heaven. Adam and Eve and could no longer make contact at will with the Creator, and the broken line of fellowship resulted in fear; hence, both Adam and Eve hid from the presence of God among the trees of the Garden.

Adam’s spirit died that day, and this is what the so-called sin nature is that mankind inherits from him. All his descendants are born only two in one – body and soul – not three in one as was Adam at the time of his creation. Even before our bodies die we are spiritually “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13). These same verses say that when we are born again through repentance and faith in Christ we are “made alive.” Now at that time the condition of our bodies doesn’t change, so it must refer to our being made alive spiritually and thereby restored to fellowship with God. We can directly communicate and know that such has actually happened.

We are born of our earthly parents with only a body and soul. This is why Jesus said “ye must be born again” (John 3:7). It is the second birth through repentance and faith in Christ that the Holy Spirit comes into us and brings our “dead” spirit (that we inherited from our father Adam) back to life so that we can actually worship “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

But having a live spirit doesn’t completely solve man’s problem. Now this spirit is the only one the individual will ever have, but the body is still aging and thus in a state of dying. Indeed, the soul is all messed up as it is still full of self, the pride of life, lust, curse words, impure thoughts, dirty or risqué jokes, covetousness, etc. At this point, the Holy Spirit takes over and begins the sanctification process by writing over the “tape” of our minds with His thoughts and His ways as we begin to study God’s Word, fellowship with other Christians etc.

Physical death occurs when the soul and spirit are separated from the body (for the Christian: “absent from the body, present with the Lord”; 2 Cor. 5:8). Obviously, the body cannot be absent from the body, so Paul can only be referring to the soul and spirit as being present with the Lord. Indeed, the body is in the grave, and it is the body that is said to be “sleeping” in Scripture (Joh. 11:11; Acts 13:36; 1 Cor. 15:51-52) – not the soul. At the Rapture the body is

## SOUL SLEEP

Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D.

*Excerpt from Apples of Gold*

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.” Proverbs 25:11

---

resurrected (but said to be “glorified”) and reunited with the soul and spirit. They have been with Christ in heaven and are that which “God will bring with him” (1 Thes. 4:14) at the Rapture (note: coming back to life as did Lazarus is not a “resurrection,” he did not get an eternal, glorified body at that time).

Now concerning soul sleep, there are two widespread misconceptions: (1) that to *die* means cessation of conscious existence; and (2) therefore, only the body dies. Again, we are “body, soul and spirit” (1 Thes. 5:23; Heb 4:12). Contrary to the teaching of soul sleep, the soul and spirit remain conscious after physical death. Consider the case of the thief on the cross. Jesus did not say, “Today verily I say unto thee,” but rather “Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luk. 23:43). The latter becomes a meaningless statement if neither of them would be conscious. Moreover, neither did our Lord say, “You will sleep today.”

What about the factual story of the rich man and Lazarus? (Luk. 16:19-31) Jesus said the rich man was conscious and in “torments,” whereas Abraham and the beggar Lazarus were in a conscious state of bliss. Though their bodies were physically dead, Abraham, Lazarus, and the rich man were all awake and communicating with one another in the spirit world. Their souls were not “dead.”

Soul-sleepers protest that the account cannot be taken literally, as it is but a parable. However, it is *not* a parable. No parable in the New Testament ever specifically refers to people by name – yet here both the beggar Lazarus and Abraham are recorded. But even were it only a parable, what would it mean? What was Christ teaching from it? He was certainly not teaching soul sleep. What kind of parable would talk about someone conscious and communicating in hell or “torments” and intend to teach soul sleep from it? So the argument that this is just a parable does not at all help the proponents of soul sleep.

Interestingly, the supporters of this doctrine rely heavily on passages from the Psalms and Ecclesiastes, yet they completely miss the context of these verses. Ecclesiastes is very clear that its observations are drawn from the viewpoint of the natural man. To the limited vision of the “natural man” walking this planet and “under the sun,” it does appear that the dead know nothing (Ecc. 9:5). Considering only an earthly viewpoint, their memory “under the sun” is soon forgotten – but not in heaven.

Verse 6 reveals the context when it states that the dead have no portion for ever in anything “that is done under the sun” (i.e., done on the present earth). That’s what the writer is commenting on. And it is certainly true, for the inheritance of the redeemed is not of this present earth. We, like Abraham, look “for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb.11:10; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-2, 16) as well as for our new undying bodies (1 Cor. 15:35–44). Indeed, the unregenerate will also have no portion forever in anything that is done under the sun. Their portion is the second death – the lake of fire that burns forever (Rev. 20:15). Similar observations may be made about their citations from the Book of Psalms.

## SOUL SLEEP

Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D.

*Excerpt from Apples of Gold*

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.” Proverbs 25:11

---

Further, we need to understand the clear statements given in the New Testament. Paul did not say that it was better to depart and “sleep until the Resurrection,” but rather to “be with Christ” (Phil 1:23). Neither did Paul say that “to be absent from the body” was to be “asleep” (2 Cor. 5:8).

The words used in these scriptures help us discern where the misunderstanding takes place. It involves the makeup of a man. Those who would deny the spirit, soul, and body: (1 Thes. 5:23) will certainly have trouble distinguishing the differences and implications involved. As Peter pointed out in Acts 2:34, David (speaking of his body, cp. vs. 29) certainly had not ascended into heaven. Nevertheless, it is a reasonable conclusion that David expected to see his dead infant son and wasn't expecting to have to wait until the resurrection of the body to do so (2 Sam. 12:23).

When Jesus led captivity captive (Eph. 4:8), who was He leading? Moreover, Hebrews 4:12 indicates that, once born again, the soul and spirit are so inseparable that only the Word of God can distinguish between the two. That is, only the Word will allow us to discern as to whether we are in the flesh and operating merely with soul power or whether by our spirit, which is under the influence of the Holy Spirit. That being so, what about the spirits in prison (1 Pet. 3:19)? Their souls were obviously with their spirits and conscious. And what about the OT references in which men in hell are speaking, questioning, and otherwise engaging in actions only possible by conscious entities? (e.g., Ezk. 32:21-32; Isa. 14:9-10).

The problem is that “soul sleep” proponents insist that the soul sleeps in the grave until the resurrection. Most maintain that at death “the breath of life” (Gen. 2:7) returns to God whereas the soul sleeps. To the contrary, the Bible teaches that to be *absent* from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Cor.5:8). Obviously, such a statement would be meaningless if that part of us that is said “to be present with the Lord” were not “the you I can know and the me you can know,” and that is the soul. Furthermore, the Hebrew for “life” in Genesis 2:7 is actually nominative, masculine, *plural*, which literally means “lives” (i.e., more than one kind), and the Hebrew for “breath” equally translates soul or spirit (or both in this case, as “life” is plural). Hence, “the breath of life” (which they say returns to God) is actually one's soul. So in a sense they are right but for the wrong reason.

Finally, what about the souls “under the altar” in Revelation 6:9-10. They are talking to God and thus are clearly not asleep. This is most telling. In view of the cited scriptures, it becomes most difficult to maintain that the Scriptures support the scenario presented by soul sleep.

---

For additional Bible study resources go to: [www.FloydNolenJonesMinistries.com](http://www.FloydNolenJonesMinistries.com)