

## Theological Equipping Class – The Intermediate State – Asleep in Christ

### What Happens when you Die?

**Atheist:** Nothing

**Roman Catholic:** Heaven, Hell, or Purgatory



### **Soul sleep:**

- 1 Corinthians 15:6 – *“Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.”*
- Psalm 6:4-5 – *“Turn, O LORD, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love. <sup>5</sup> For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who will give you praise?”*

**Popular Evangelical view:** Soul is “freed” from the body

### The Scripture “Windows” into what happens when we die:

Sheol – The place of the dead

- You won’t find the word “Hell” in the Old Testament
- “Sheol” is used 63x as the place where all dead go (both righteous and unrighteous)

Philippians 1:21-26 – *“<sup>21</sup> For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup> If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. <sup>23</sup> I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. <sup>24</sup> But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.”*

1. Death is a “departure” from the body and the world.
2. Dying (“departing”) is “gain”...“far better.”
3. Dying (“departing”) is to “be with Christ.”
4. This intermediate communion with Christ takes place while awaiting the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming/Resurrection.

- “The gospel is not a way to get people to heaven; it is a way to get people to God. It's a way of overcoming every obstacle to everlasting joy in God. If we don't want God above all things, we have not been converted by the gospel.” – John Piper, *God is the Gospel*

2 Corinthians 5:1-9 – “For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. <sup>2</sup> For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, <sup>3</sup> if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. <sup>4</sup> For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. <sup>5</sup> He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. <sup>6</sup> So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, <sup>7</sup> for we walk by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup> Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. <sup>9</sup> So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.”

1. While we are “at home in the body” (in our “tent”) we are away from the Lord.
2. Though death and being with Christ is “far better,” our soul’s being “unclothed” is a feeling of nakedness.
3. Our ultimate hope is in the eternal resurrected bodies God has prepared for us.

Revelation 6:9-11 – “When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. <sup>10</sup> They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” <sup>11</sup> Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.”

1. Their souls are in Heaven with God after death.
2. They are aware of and concerned about God’s work on the earth.
3. They are praying for and anticipating the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming/Final Judgment.

Luke 16:19-31 – “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. <sup>20</sup> And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, <sup>21</sup> who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. <sup>22</sup> The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, <sup>23</sup> and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. <sup>24</sup> And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ <sup>25</sup> But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime

received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. <sup>26</sup> And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ <sup>27</sup> And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house— <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ <sup>29</sup> But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ <sup>30</sup> And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ <sup>31</sup> He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

1. Righteous Lazarus is with the saints after death.
2. Unrighteous rich man is away from the saints and tormented after death.
3. No second chances after death.
4. This “hades” (place of the dead) is not the final destination but anticipates the final destination.

Luke 23:42-43 – “And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” <sup>43</sup> And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

1. The thief on the cross will consciously be with Jesus “today” in “paradise.”

Acts 7:54-60 – “<sup>54</sup> Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. <sup>55</sup> But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. <sup>56</sup> And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” <sup>57</sup> But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. <sup>58</sup> Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. <sup>59</sup> And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” <sup>60</sup> And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”

1. Stephen body goes into the ground and his spirit/soul is “received by the Lord.”
2. Stephen prays for the gospel work to continue.

Matthew 17:1-3 – “And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup> And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. <sup>3</sup> And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.”

1. Moses and Elijah are aware of Jesus and His mission.

Matthew 22:31-32 – “<sup>31</sup> *And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: <sup>32</sup> ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.*”

1. The dead saints go to be with God.

Hebrews 12:1 – “*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us*”

1. The dead saints are with God and conscious of what is happening in God’s mission on earth.

### **Putting it all Together:**

- We are created body and soul.
- At death our bodies go into the ground and souls leave our bodies.
- When those in Christ die:
  - Souls go to be with God (Heaven = God’s presence)
  - This is “gain/far better” but not the end of the story.
  - Disembodied souls have a feeling of “nakedness.”
  - They are conscious of their present state and events on earth/God’s mission.
  - They are eagerly awaiting the resurrection, final judgment, and New Heavens and New Earth.
- When those outside of Christ die:
  - Souls go to a place of punishment and torment away from God.
  - They await the resurrection, final judgment, and eternal Hell/Lake of Fire.

### Why is this Important?:

1. This gives you an unshakable confidence in this life.
2. This gives you the proper perspective on God’s ultimate mission.
3. This gives you an unstoppable fuel to participate in the mission of God.
4. This allows you to give and receive Gospel comfort when loved ones die.
  - a. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 – “*But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. <sup>15</sup> For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who*

*are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words.”*

5. This allows us to value God’s physical creation.
6. This shows us the goal of “Heaven” is being with Jesus.
  - a. “The critical question for our generation—and for every generation— is this: If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ were not there? ” – John Piper

#### Death and our Union with Christ:

- Romans 8:38-39 – *“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*
- 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 – *“For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.”*
- “Death does not eradicate the believer’s union with Christ or communion with fellow believers. Whatever life is ahead in the eschatological future, interim and final, it can only be a “life in Christ.” – Michael Bird

#### *A Dialogue-Anthem* by George Herbert

- Alas, poor Death! Where is thy glory?  
Where is thy famous force, thy ancient sting?
- Alas, poor mortal, void of story!  
Go spell and read how I have killed thy King.
- Poor Death! And who was hurt thereby?  
Thy curse being laid on Him makes thee accurst.
- Let losers talk, yet thou shalt die;  
These arms shall crush thee.
- Spare not, do thy worst.  
I shall be one day better than before;  
Thou so much worse, that thou shalt be no more.