

THE STATE OF THE SOUL AFTER DEATH (JND)

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The state of the soul after death is a subject which deeply interests us all. The rejection of the coming again of Christ to receive the saints, and to judge the earth, before the end of the world, and the losing sight of the distinctive importance given to the resurrection in the New Testament, has given in the common evangelical faith, and that where sound in the main, an absolute character to the vague idea of going to heaven, exclusive of all other conception of happiness and glory. But Scripture spoke too plainly of the Lord's coming and the resurrection of the saints, to allow the thought of going to heaven when we die to maintain the absorbing place it held in the minds of the pious. Strange to say, going to heaven is not spoken of in Scripture, unless in the one case of the thief upon the cross going to be with Christ in paradise. Not that we do not go there; but the scriptural thought is always going to Christ. Since He is in heaven, of course we go there; but being with Christ, not being in heaven, is what Scripture puts forward, and this is important as to the state of the spiritual affections. Christ is the object before the soul, according to the word, not simply being happy in heaven, though we shall be happy and in heaven. I speak of it only as characterising our habits of thought. Poor human nature is apt to fall into Scylla to avoid Charybdis. It is apt, too, to follow its own thoughts, not simply to receive the word of God. There was a reaction, and the recovered truth of the Lord's coming and the first resurrection obtained an importance in some minds, which eclipsed the going to heaven when we die, too vague, and too little formally scriptural, to satisfy those awakened to search the word. It was stated that the soul sleeps, is unconscious, till the resurrection, even by some who, in the main, were sound in the faith; while with others this notion carried them on to deny not only the immediate bliss of the departed, with Christ, but that we ever went to heaven, and what constitutes distinctive Christian hope. Alas! soon very many were led to deny the fundamental doctrines of the gospel.

My object now is not to enter into controversy with these last, who deny the immortality of the soul; it has been done, and done very effectually, by more than one; my object is to give a plain scriptural statement and proof from Scripture, that there is immediate happiness with Christ for the departed Christian. It is an intermediate state, and so, as to His position as a man, is Christ's though He be in glory. The departing Christian waits for the resurrection of the body — and then only will he be in his final state in glory. Men speak of glorified spirits, Scripture never. The purpose of God as to us is, that we should be conformed to the image of His Son, that He may be the firstborn among many brethren. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." "As we have borne the image of the earthy, so also we shall bear the image of the heavenly." This was exhibited for a moment when Moses and Elias appeared in glory with Christ at the transfiguration.

(See Rom. 8:29; 1 John 3:2; 1 Cor. 15:49; Luke 9:28-36.) This, and to be for ever with the Lord, received to Himself in the Father's house, is our eternal state of joy and glory. This latter part is seen also in the account of the transfiguration, in Luke, where they enter (Moses and Elias) into the cloud whence the Father's voice proceeded. (See also 1 Thess. 4:17.) But this is our eternal state, when Christ shall have come and received us to Himself raised, or changed into His likeness, when our poor earthly body shall have been fashioned like His glorious body; Phil. 3:21. God hath wrought us now already for this selfsame thing, and given to us the earnest of the Spirit; 2 Cor. 5:5. To be with the Lord and like the Lord for ever is our everlasting joy, and that the fruit of God's love, who has made us His children, and will bring us into the mansions prepared in our Father's house. Two things belong to us: first, to be like and with Christ Himself; and, secondly, to be blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Him. Redemption has made this ours; but we are not in possession. We have only the earnest of the Spirit, though God has wrought us for that selfsame thing.

The first point, being like Christ, we have already spoken of, though what has been cited there introduces us with scriptural authority, to the second — so shall we ever be with the Lord. But I add here other proofs of the second point, namely, that our portion is in heavenly places. It is distinctive of believers who have believed and suffered with Him. God, we are told, will gather together in one, under Christ, all things, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; Eph. 1:10. So we read all things were created by Christ and for Christ (Col. 1:16, 20); all things will be put under His feet as man; Heb. 2; 1 Cor. 15: 27, 28; Eph. 1:22. But we read in Hebrews 2 that all things are not yet put under Him. He sits now on the Father's throne, not on His own; Rev. 3 . 21. God has said, Sit at my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool. He is (Heb. 10) expecting till His enemies be made His footstool. The time will come when not only all things in heaven and earth will be reconciled (Col. 1:20), but even things under the earth, infernal things, will be forced to recognise His power and authority. Every knee shall bow to Him, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ, the despised and rejected of men, is Lord, to the glory of God the Father; Phil. 2:10, 11. For this we must wait. But in this gathering of all things in heaven and earth under one head, Christ, our part is in heavenly places, and as it is our portion now in spirit, so it will be our part in glory. Nor is there any real separation between these two. Of course we are not in glory now, there is no need to insist on that, but that is our calling now, that which we are redeemed to, and wrought for, and wait for. Now we have the treasure in earthly vessels, and groan, being burdened. When we are out of the body groaning is over, and we are with Christ in joy; when He comes we shall have a body suited to that heavenly place, we shall be in glory. Thus (Eph. 1:3), "He hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ"

(2 Cor. 5:1), "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"; Philippians 3:20, "Our conversation [citizenship, our relationship in life as Christians] is in heaven"; and in the same chapter, verse 14, where you have 'high calling,' the true force of the word is calling above, as may be seen in a Bible with a margin. We are called to be up above there. So, in Hebrews 6:19, 20, we read that Christ is entered within the veil, that is, heaven itself; chapter 9:24, and as our forerunner. So, Hebrews 3, we are partakers of the heavenly calling. As united to Christ by the Holy Ghost, we are sitting in heavenly places in Christ — not with Him yet, but in Him, that is our place. So, when the Lord comes, He gathers, indeed, as Son of man, out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity. But the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Hence, Moses and Elias not only are manifested in glory on earth, to shew the state of the saints in the kingdom, but they enter into the cloud, God's dwelling-place, whence the Father's voice came.

It is thus clear that as God will gather together in one all things, both which are in heaven and on the earth, our part is to be like Christ in glory, and with Him for ever, and that in heaven itself, blessed with all spiritual blessings (as Israel with temporal ones) and in heavenly places (as they in earthly). If we are joint-heirs with Him (Rom. 8:17), we have what is yet better, to dwell in the Father's house where He is gone. Hence it is clearly and distinctly expressed (Col. 1:5), that our hope is laid up for us in heaven, and Peter tells us (1 Pet. 1:4) that an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, is reserved in heaven for us. All this clearly shews our blessings are where our hope enters, where our forerunner is gone; what our glory is, celestial, not terrestrial. We shall bear the image of the heavenly, and shall be for ever with the Lord. He has gone to prepare a place for us in the Father's house, and will come again to receive us there to Himself. He has declared, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me be with me where I am." One might expatiate on the blessedness of this, the wondrous place given to us, that in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us in Christ Jesus! but my object now is to give the scripture statement of our blessedness, and the proofs of it. What I have said gives our calling the same throughout, from the moment we are called, to the glory of eternity. There is no other, there is "one hope of our calling." God has called us to His own kingdom and glory; we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Their Father's house is the home of His children. But this has not told us, in distinct statements, what the intermediate state is, though it has

shewn us, as a general principle, where all our blessing is, what redemption has obtained for us. The God of all grace has called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus; wondrous love! but an integral part of Christ's own glory, for what is a Redeemer without His redeemed? And once I believe that the blessed Son of God has died for me as man on the cross, nothing that a creature whose life He has become, can have is too great, as the effect of it.

The whole object of the Epistle to the Hebrews is to shew that our portion is heavenly, in contrast with the Judaism which was, and, when Israel is restored, will be, earthly. They had a high priest on earth, because God sat between the cherubim down here. Such a High Priest became us; holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, made higher than the heavens: why? because our place and portion are with God there. Our place and calling are in the heavenlies. All had to be suited to this; the excellence of the sacrifice and the service of the priest. But how far does the word of God shew us our intermediate state, between the time of our being in this tabernacle, in which we groan, and having it glorified, when Christ comes, and shall change our vile body, and fashion it like His glorious body? Once we have understood the previous passage, and that our calling and portion are heavenly, all is simple and plain. Our citizenship now and always is in heaven. How far we enjoy it when we die is the only question — more than here, or less? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live unto Him (Luke 20:38), though dead for this world, they are for Him as alive as ever, and so for faith. But it is alleged they sleep. There is no ground for this whatever. Stephen fell asleep, that is, died. It was not his soul fell asleep after death; those which sleep in Jesus shall God bring with Him (1 Thess. 4:14), but these (v. 16) are the dead in Christ. Some have fallen asleep, that is, had died (1 Cor. 15:6), the same word as sleep in Jesus, in 1 Thessalonians 4. This is contrasted with being alive, in Thessalonians, with remaining to this present, in Corinthians. It is just simply dying, and a beautiful expression to shew they had not at all ceased to exist, but would wake up again in resurrection, as a man out of sleep. This is clearly determined in the case of Lazarus; John 11. The Lord says, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep. They thought it was taking of rest in sleep; then said He plainly, Lazarus has died. That is, sleep means plainly dying, and awaking is not awaking the soul, as if it slept apart, and so leaving it, but bringing back from the state of death by resurrection. A Christian's falling asleep is neither more nor less than dying; a soul's sleeping is a pure invention. People living upon this earth fell asleep; that is, they died. That is what it means in plain speech, and nothing else, and we do learn clearly in Scripture the state of those who die in the Lord. Paul knew that God had wrought him (and he speaks of it as to all Christians, as their common faith) for glory, and did not wish to die (be unclothed) as if weary, but that mortality should be swallowed up of life.

Christians have Christ as their life, as they have Him as their righteousness, and, this being so, as to death itself (2 Cor. 5:6), they are always confident, knowing that whilst they are at home in the body they are absent from the Lord. Life, eternal life, in Christ they have, but here it lives absent from the Lord, in the earthen vessel; when it leaves the poor earthen vessel, which makes it groan, being burdened, it will be present with the Lord. Is that better or worse, and where is He? Is it, though it has already the Holy Ghost as the power of life, the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, going to sleep, and knowing nothing? Is that the confidence he had, who saw such a power in this life in Christ, that he was not, as his object, looking to die, but mortality to be swallowed up by it; yet, when it lost the tabernacle which made it groan, it was not capable of anything else! And remember Christ is our life; because He lives, we live. Have we lost our connection with Him when we die? Does He sleep in us? Again (Phil. 1) Paul was in a strait betwixt two, to depart and be with Christ, which was far better, dying — mark what he was speaking of — gain, though living with Christ. That is, he, having the blessed joy of knowing Christ was his life, and living entirely for Him, so that it was worth his while to stay, yet found it far better, gain, to go to sleep and know nothing of Christ or anything else! not having a thought of Christ or possibility of serving Him, his desire, as to his own joy, was to go to sleep, and know nothing of Christ at all. Is it not perfectly evident, that when he speaks of being with Christ, and of its being far better than serving Him here, though that was worth while, he speaks of the joy of being there? Who would think, if I spoke of the

satisfaction and gain of going to somebody, and being with him, I meant I was going to be fast asleep, and not know I was there? But we have more: the Lord declares to the thief, who alone of all men, in that memorable hour, confessed Him, that he should be with Him that day in paradise. Was it not happiness He promised him, being with Christ and in paradise? Does that mean that he should be fast asleep, and know nothing? I ask if it be not supremely ridiculous, and flying in the face of the very point of Christ's words. The statement occurs in Luke, who, all through his Gospel, after the first two chapters, which are consecrated to the poor pious remnant who waited for Christ, and give a most lovely picture of them — God's hidden ones in the midst of rebellious and unbelieving Israel — after these chapters, I say, the Evangelist gives the testimony of divine grace in the Son of man, and the present state. He proceeds with the genealogy of Christ up to Adam, and then unfolds, all through his Gospel, the grace that in the Son of man blesses man, and blesses him now, and in a heavenly way.

It is not dispensational, like Matthew, but grace and present grace, and heavenly grace, by the gospel, the present state of things. It answers, as far as it goes, to the testimony of Paul and the Acts. Now the poor thief, while a most bright and eminent instance of the power of grace and faith, confessing Christ as Lord, when everything contradicted it, naturally did not go in knowledge beyond his countrymen. He was sure that He who hung upon the cross would come in (not into) His kingdom, and prayed that Christ might remember him then, in blessed confidence in Him. The Lord's answer was, according to the whole tenor of the gospel, You shall not wait for that. I bring salvation by grace; to-day, this selfsame day, you shall be with Me in paradise, the fit companion of Christ in blessedness. This, then, is the portion of the departed saint, to be with Christ in blessedness, absent from the body, and present with the Lord. I am aware of the miserable subterfuge, by which it is attempted to read it — verily, I say unto you this day, thou shalt be with Me in paradise. It not only destroys the whole characteristic point of the passage, according to the tenor of the Gospel it is found in, but it perverts the order of the passage, as it destroys its sense. "To-day" is at the beginning of the phrase, to give it emphasis in answer to when Thou comest. There is the solemn assertion, "Verily, I say unto thee." To add 'to-day' to this is simply puerile, destroying withal the allusion to the request of the thief, who only hopes to be remembered when Christ should come in His kingdom. No, says the Lord, with the solemn 'verily' which He used, you shall not wait till then, this day you shall be with Me. What is the sense of "Verily I say unto thee this day"? It destroys the solemnity of the assertion, but "Verily I say unto thee, this day shalt thou be with me in paradise" more than fulfilled the hopes of the thief, and revealed to us other than earthly joys, when we leave this world to depart and to be with Christ. The wickedness of the Jews, as an instrument, fulfilled the promise in breaking his legs, as it did that in which the work of redemption was accomplished, which gave the poor thief a title to be there. Such, too, was the expectation of Stephen, when death arrested his course here. He saw Christ, and looked to Him to receive His spirit. Did He receive it? And was it only to put an end to his service and joy alike, and put him to sleep?

The intermediate state, then, is not glory (for that we must wait for the body. It is raised in glory, He shall change our vile bodies, and fashion them like His glorious body); but it is blessedness where no unholy evil is. It is being with Christ Himself, the source of joy ineffable. The hopes and "always confident" of Paul, of Stephen, were not disappointed, nor did the assurance given by the Lord to the thief fail of fulfilment. I ask if the bright hopes spoken of in 2 Corinthians 5, Philippians 1, in Acts 7, and the Lord's words to the thief, for any honest mind, can mean going fast asleep, and knowing nothing? When the Lord described the state of the rich man and Lazarus, did it mean that either the wicked or the just were asleep, and knowing nothing? I shall be told it is a figurative description. I admit it fully; but it is not a false one, and it is not a figure of men going to sleep and knowing nothing. But, further, if 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 means being happy with Christ, it means being happy with Him when we die. Death is the subject spoken of, for the apostle had despaired of life (2 Cor. 1); and absent from the body, and present with the Lord, is not resurrection, it means leaving the body, not taking it; departing and being with Christ is not His coming and raising or

changing us to be in glory. The apostle is speaking there again of death, remaining here, or leaving the world. It was dying which was gain; Phil. 1:21. Life and death are in distinct contrast in verse 20, and then analuo is used for dying (v. 23), as is analisis; 2 Tim. 4:6. The attempt to apply analuo or analisis to Christ's return, because it is used for breaking up from or leaving a festival, is a poor conceit, contradicting the express statements of the passage. The word means disuniting or destroying what is united, and so is used for death. Neither Philippians 1 nor 2 Timothy 4 leave a trace of doubt in the matter. The effort to pervert Luke 23:43 and Philippians 1:20-23 is only a proof that the force of the passage cannot be got over, and the character of the effort to set them aside betrays itself.

How a spirit enjoys Christ we cannot tell as to the manner of it, but there is no difficulty whatever. My spirit enjoys Christ now, in spite of the hindrance of the poor earthen vessel it is in, and though now we see Him not, yet rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. It is not my body which enjoys Him now, but my soul spiritually, with the hindrance of the earthen vessel, and absent from Him, then without the hindrance of the earthen vessel, and present with Him. The believer may rest perfectly assured that, departing from the body, he will be present with the Lord, and if His presence is joy to him, that joy will be his. No one would be more anxious to press the Lord's coming, and our waiting for Him, and the importance of the resurrection. I would urge it, as I have urged it, on the saints, and indeed upon all, in its due place; but not to weaken that all live to God, even if they are spirits in prison, nor the excellent joy and blessedness of being with Christ when we depart, that to die is gain. It has justly cheered and shed heavenly light on many a dying bed, and yet will, if the Lord tarry; and the scripture is as plain as to the happiness of the saint on his departure as to his being with Christ, far better, as to joy, than the most successful service here, as it is that Christ will come and take all His saints to be with Him for ever in glory, like Himself; though the latter is the full and final state of eternal blessedness, when the marriage of the Lamb withal shall have come, and when we shall be for ever with the Lord.

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Lightly Revised.

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