

I. ERRORS CONCERNING THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

A. [We must remember that the intermediate state is not our *final* hope]. The intermediate state is the state of the soul between physical death and the final resurrection at the Second Coming.

- 1. Death is not the end because we have apart from the body a *soul* which exists after death.**
 - a. Atheism is materialistic: atheism teaches that man consists only of a body *without a soul*.
 - b. But the Bible teaches that humans have souls which are conscious after death and exist apart from the body (Matt. 10:28; Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59; Rev. 6:9-10, 20:4).
 - c. This is true of believers & unbelievers but their state (or condition) is different (Luke 16:22-23).
- 2. The intermediate state concerns the body as well.**
 - a. At the point of death the body separated from the soul is subject to corruption and begins to return to its dust (Gen. 3:19).
 - b. In this sense, the believer “sleeps” until the final resurrection of the body (Dan. 12:2; Matt. 27:52; Acts 7:60; Acts 13:36; I Cor. 15:6, 18, 20, 51; I Thess. 4:13-15; II Pet. 3:4).
 - c. When we bury our believing loved ones it is with hope that the body will one day rise again. The Bible even uses the figure of planting a seed (I Cor. 15:42-44).

B. Greek philosophy (without God’s revelation) taught the “immortality of the soul.”

- 1. Many Greek philosophers taught that man has a soul which can never die (“immortal”).**
 - a. The state of the soul after death depended on the kind of life a person lived on earth.
 - b. Generally, Greeks despised the body. They saw the soul as something noble degraded by the passions of the body. The idea of the resurrection of the body was absurd and abhorrent.
 - c. It was not uncommon to think of the body as a prison which hindered the soul.
- 2. The common conception of unbelievers who are not materialists is similar to this.**
 - a. Many unbelievers reject the very concept of a soul: when you are dead, that is it.
 - b. But others believe in a soul and expect the state of the soul to be happy after death: the proliferation of “near death experiences” and other stories is proof of this to many.
 - c. The Bible does not teach that the soul is naturally immortal or good: the soul *does* survive death, but the state of the soul of the wicked is not immortality or life. It is death! (Rev. 20:14).

II. SOUL SLEEP & PURGATORY [These are the two major errors concerning the intermediate state].

A. Soul sleep is the teaching of cults such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses

- 1. The teaching of the soul sleep is that the soul either ceases to exist between death and the resurrection or that the soul exists in an unconscious state.**
 - a. Jehovah’s Witnesses actually deny the existence of the soul: they teach that the person who dies ceases to exist, knows nothing after death and will be brought back on the Last Day.
 - b. Therefore, for JW’s there is no “intermediate state” as such. Concepts of heaven, hell, etc. are denied by the JW’s and other religious groups.
 - c. Soul sleep was also the teaching of many Anabaptist groups in Reformation times. In fact, Calvin’s first theological work was called Psychopannychia (“The Wakefulness of Souls”).
- 2. There are various passages to which “soul sleep” advocates appeal in support of their doctrine.**
 - a. There are the many passages which speak of the believer “sleeping” in Jesus (I Thess. 4:13). To sleep, however, is not to cease to exist (as JW’s imagine it), but more importantly, sleeping here pertains to the body, not the soul (Dan. 12:2).
 - b. There are passages which indicate that those who are dead have no consciousness. But all of these passages refer to having no consciousness to things *happening on the earth*, and to the inability to serve God in the earth (Psa. 6:5, 146:4; Eccl. 9:5-6).
 - c. At the point of death the soul continues to exist in a conscious state of glory or torment.
- 3. Our objection to soul sleep is that it interrupts the blessed communion we have with Christ.**
 - a. If the soul “sleeps” unconsciously after death it no longer experiences the joy of fellowship with God in Jesus Christ. This was Calvin’s objection, “These men not only intermit the work of God

for a time, but even extinguish it. Those who formerly went from faith to faith, from virtue to virtue, and enjoyed a foretaste of blessedness when they exercised themselves in thinking of God they deprive of both faith and virtue and all thought of God and merely place on beds in a sluggish and lethargic state ... do they think [Paul] wishes to fall asleep so as no longer to feel any desire of Christ? ... Where were the benefit of being with Christ were he to cease to live the life of Christ?" ("Psychopannychia," *Tracts*, vol. 3, p. 444).

- b. The believer expects to live in the soul and consciously to enjoy Christ after death which is better than the experience he has with Christ now (Luke 23:43, 46; Acts 7:59; II Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23).

B. The second major error is purgatory.

1. Purgatory is a teaching of Roman Catholicism: a place of purification of the soul after death.

- a. According to Roman Catholicism there are three intermediate states: heaven, hell and purgatory.
- b. Purgatory is for those who die in a state of grace but are not sufficiently holy to enter heaven.
- c. "Sin must be expiated. This may be done on this earth through the sorrows, miseries and trials of this life, and above all through death. Otherwise the expiation must be made in the next life through fire and torments and purifying punishments" (Apostolic Constitution on the Revision of Indulgences, *Vatican Two*, p. 63); "All who die in God's grace & friendship but still imperfectly purified are indeed assured of their eternal salvation, but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven" (*Catholic Catechism*, para. 1030).

2. Rome appeals to various texts in support of her doctrine of purgatory.

- a. II Maccabees 12:44-45, "For if he had not hoped that they that were slain should have risen again, it had been superfluous and vain to pray for the dead. And also in that he perceived that there was great favour laid up for those that died godly it was a holy and good thought. Whereupon he made reconciliation for the dead that they might be delivered from sin." *The Apocrypha are not Scripture and this passage does not teach purgatory* (II Macc. 15:38).
- b. Matthew 5:26: Jesus holds out possibility of release after the payment of the uttermost farthing. *But Jesus simply means here that the debtor will never be released because he can never pay!*
- c. Matthew 12:32: Jesus denies the possibility of certain sins being forgiven in this world or in the world to come. Therefore He holds out the possibility that certain sins will be forgiven after death. *This is a huge leap, an enormous stretch.*
- d. I Corinthians 3:15: salvation "as by fire" refers to purgatory. *This refers to a test of ministers' work on the Day of Judgment. Their works (not their persons or souls) shall be burned.*
- e. Revelation 21:27: nothing impure shall enter heaven. *Absolutely! That is why we are cleansed in the blood of Christ from all sin* (Heb. 10:14; I John 1:7, 9).

3. Purgatory is a horrible blasphemy against Christ.

- a. It denies the sufficiency of Christ's atonement on the cross: we have nothing to pay.
- b. It removes all comfort from death b/c the Roman Catholic faces gloomy prospect of purgatory.
- c. It is a scandalous money spinner for the Romish church: because masses, indulgences, etc. are the way to expedite a loved one's release from purgatory (see Psa. 49:6-9; II Pet. 2:3).
- d. *Calvin*: "We must cry out with the shouting not only of our voices, but of our throats and lungs, that purgatory is a deadly fiction of Satan, which nullifies the cross of Christ, inflicts unbearable contempt upon God's mercy, and overturns and destroys our faith ... the blood of Christ is the sole satisfaction for the sins of believers, the sole expiation, the sole purgation; what remains but to say that purgatory is simply a dreadful blasphemy against Christ?" (*Institutes III, V, 6*).