

SOUL SLEEPING: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

By Milton Smith

There are a few dangerous cults - masquerading in the form of Christianity - that teach the false idea of "soul sleeping." Simply stated, the doctrine teaches that one is completely unconscious from death until the time of resurrection. In other words, when a person dies, he literally goes out of existence until the time he is called from the grave when the Lord returns.

One of the passages often used by those who teach the error of soul sleeping is 1 Thessalonians 4:13, where Paul writes, "But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope." But because the Bible clearly teaches that one's spirit remains conscious even when separated from the body, we must logically conclude that the figure of sleep here is simply referring to the state of one's body at death and not to his eternal spirit.

Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 12:7, "Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it." Paul once wrote about his desire to "depart and be with Christ" which he said "is far better." (Philippians 1:23.) We find Moses and Elijah appearing on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus, although both had departed from this world centuries earlier. (Matthew 17.) When Paul spoke of being taken up to the "third heaven" he admitted that he was not sure if he was in his body or out of his body when this amazing event occurred. (2 Corinthians 12:2,3.) This inspired apostle obviously knew that his spirit could be removed from the physical body and still remain in a conscious state.

Of course, no clearer example could be given than the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Both died, yet their departed spirits are found to be

in a conscious state in the next world. (Luke 16:19-31.)

Having preached many funerals, I have found that it brings great comfort to the hearts of grieving family members when they realize that their faithful loved one is fully conscious on the other side awaiting their arrival. Like Paul, they too have found that to "depart and be with Christ" is "far better."

The false doctrine of soul sleeping is nowhere taught in the Scriptures. "Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from the labors, and their works follow them." (Revelation 14:13.)

— Tulsa, OK

THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS

By Danny Tunnell

In 1955, Billy Graham wrote a book entitled: The Secret of Happiness. As was typical for Mr. Graham, the book sold millions of copies.

But what was life like 65 years ago, back in 1955? Think about the advancement of technology that has taken place since then! In 1955 there was no internet. In 1955 people wrote letters, and mailed them through the postal service. It was a time when people read the daily newspaper to find out what was happening. There were no cell phones in 1955. As people traveled by automobiles, they used paper maps to guide them.

Today, most people send an email instead of writing a letter, purchasing a stamp and dropping it in the mail. We find out about anything we want to know on Google. Few people depend on paper maps as our phones give us accurate directions by GPS.

Surely times have changed! However, finding the secret of

happiness in 2020 is pretty much the same as it was in 1955.

Here are a few suggestions:

- (1) Be Kind. A simple act of kindness can lift the spirits of someone who has had a hard day. (Ephesians 4:32.)
- (2) Today's social media takes way too much of our time. Take time to interact with your children more. You'll be glad you did. (Proverbs 22:6.)
- (3) Stay faithful to Jesus Christ. Make him your top priority. (Matthew 6:33.)
- (4) Share the gospel daily. (Mark 16:15.)
- (5) Don't let anything - your career, house, hobby, or social media become an object of worship. (Exodus 20:3,4.)
- (6) Be thankful for and content with what you have. Don't

worry about what others are accumulating. (Philippians 4:11,12; Hebrews 13:5.)

(7) Watch your language and don't tear people down. Don't gossip. (Ephesians 4:29.)

(8) Walk by faith. (2 Corinthians 5:7.)

Times have changed, but principles taught in the word of God abide forever. "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever." (Isaiah 40:8.)

— Miami, OK

"Happy are those who don't listen to the wicked, who don't go where sinners go, who don't do what evil people do. They love the Lord's teachings, and they think about those teachings day and night." (Psalm 1:1,2, NCV.)

Old Paths

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"ask for the old paths" (Jer. 6:16)

WE MUST GROW UP

By Hank Lawrence

In 1995, park rangers in the Grand Canyon National Park had to kill over two dozen mule deer because they became hooked on junk food left by visitors to the park - things like potato chips, cheese curls, and candy. It was reported that once they got a taste of the sugar and salt, the deer developed an extreme addiction and went to any lengths to eat only junk food. As a result, the animals ignored the food they needed, leaving them in poor health and on the edge of starvation. Their junk food cravings caused them to lose their natural ability to digest vegetation. Their pursuit for pleasure was their downfall in the end as the deer ultimately had to be put down. These deer remind me of a child who has no idea of the consequences of their actions and seeks only pleasure without any regard to their personal well-being. However, there comes a time when we must all be asked, "Why don't you just grow up?" As a basic observation, children are flighty creatures who live for the moment. They don't look ahead to see the consequences of their actions and they tend to avoid all responsibility. In the parable of the feast (Luke 14:16-24), the Lord deals with the need for us to spiritually grow up.

The parable begins with the invitation to a great feast. The people invited to the feast knew of it in advance, but when the time came, suddenly they came up with excuses right and left to avoid going. Just to put these excuses in our modern understanding, here is why they are so foolish. One said he needed to look at land he had just bought, but how many times have you bought land unseen? Another gave the excuse that he needed to try out the fine yoke of oxen he had just bought. How many of you buy an automobile without a test drive? One even said he had just married and could not come. Why not bring the bride along with him? The lord was rightly angry and filled his home with people willing to come; people who would truly appreciate what he offered.

The Lord applies this parable in Luke 14:25-35 and unveils an issue we see all too frequently today. There are many people who accept the Lord's invitation to become a Christian, but they are unwilling to follow through on commitment. Some will put family first, others will put themselves first. "If any man comes to me, and hates not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:26.) Family is important, and so is taking care of ourselves, but our main focus must be on God. Children want to go to their grandparents to play but don't want to take the trip to get there. People want heaven, but don't want to be forced to sit through worship. (Malachi 1:12-13.) We want the wisdom, but not the education. (James 1:2-5.)

Children are wonderful gifts from God. However, we cannot remain spiritual children forever. There comes a time when we must grow up. That time is now. (Romans 13:11-14; 2 Corinthians 6:1,2.) Let us strive to heed the words of the writer of Hebrews: "Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief." (Hebrews 4:11.)

— West Plains, MO

"Love Not The World"

By Cecil Burch

"The Lord said to Moses, 'Behold, the days approach when you must die; call Joshua and present yourselves in the tabernacle of meeting that I may inaugurate him.' So Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves in the tabernacle of meeting." (Deuteronomy 31:14.)

Inauguration Day for Joshua must have been a sad day in the life of Moses, not that he himself was going to die, but because the Lord said, "This people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them, and they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them." (Deuteronomy 31:16.) God revealed to Moses that, after entering Canaan, Israel would conform to the society of the idol worshippers even after God had fed, clothed, provided water, and fought their battles. The frightening part of the message is that God said, "Then My anger shall be aroused against them in that day, and I will forsake them." (Deuteronomy 31:17.)

The Apostle Paul instructed the Christians in Rome not to conform when he said, "I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:2.)

The Apostle John said, "Do not love the world, or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (1 John 2:15.)

Jesus said, "For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul." (Mark 8:36.)

There is One who, long ago, refused to conform and was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem.

— Amarillo, TX

"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.' Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.'" (1 Corinthians 6:14-17.)

OF BLIND FAITH AND FOOLS

By Dalton Key

Both evidence and reason point convincingly to faith in God. The disparaging charge of “blind faith,” often leveled against the conviction of believers, better describes these selfsame cynics who somehow see a cosmos absent any creator.

“For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God.” (Hebrews 3:4.) A house presumes a builder. To imagine a house building itself, or accidentally exploding into existence, is to contemplate the absurd. Such nonsense, removed from any empirical, philosophical, or historical foundation of fact, would be nothing more than “blind faith.”

There is, though, a faith even more ridiculous and even more blind.

The premise that everything in our universe - mass and matter, living tissue and intelligent life - came into existence without a designer, without a maker, has become a matter of faith for many of today’s pseudo-scientists; men and women who propagate and defend their faith with a religious fervor tending toward outright fanaticism. If you doubt this, just try disagreeing with their views.

With nothing to work with other than conjecture and theory, such faith, no matter how firmly held, is nothing if not blind.

Simply put, which reveals a blinder faith: the belief that everything came into existence from nothing, naturally, without God; or the conviction that all things must have come from some source, from some beginning - in this case from the God of heaven?

The Bible, as always, has it right. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:2.) “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth . . . For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.” (Psalm 33:6, 9.) “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. . .” (Psalm 19:1-4.)

Perhaps the truism of truisms is this inspired nugget from Psalm 53, verse one: “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”

Fools come and fools go but the God of all things lives on.

EDITORIALLY SPEAKING . . .

WORDS OF WARNING

By Dalton Key

We live in a world obsessed with safety. Many of our products are required by law to clearly display warning labels, alerting us to dangers that might be related to the use or misuse of the items in question. Cigarette packages warn of cancer, heart disease, and death. Household cleaners, detergents, and pesticides warn consumers of their potential dangers. Even something as seemingly harmless as a stepladder is required to have stamped on it a warning about standing on the top rung or weighing it down with too heavy a load.

I wonder! what if God were in the business of posting warning labels? What might they say?

Imagine all paper currency with these words printed on both sides: “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” 1 Timothy 6:10.)

What if all malls and retail stores prominently displayed this disclaimer: “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” (Luke 12:15.)

Think of packages, pouches and plates of food, all with warnings reminding us, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4.)

Perhaps all running shoes, all exercise equipment, and all sports-related products would carry a label, warning, “Bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.” (1 Timothy 4:8,9.)

It might be helpful if our TVs, our computers, and all of our electronic devices had the following warning permanently flashing in the lower, right-hand corner of the screen: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” (1 John 2:15.)

Surely all textbooks, self-help books, and tomes of knowledge would be improved with the addition of these important words of warning: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5,6.)

Paul’s words seem especially relevant. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16,17.)

Yes, it might be both interesting and enlightening if God were to print His own labels of warning.

But then again, hasn’t He already?



GOD’S SEED

By Bobby Key

When Jesus was on earth, He taught the parable of the sower. In His explanation of the parable He said that the word of God is the seed of the kingdom. As the apostles and evangelists and members of the early church went forth preaching, their message was nothing more than the Word of God. It was, therefore, the seed of the kingdom; and wherever this seed was sown and an increase given, it produced the kingdom of God, or the church. The church of the first century was the model church for all ages to come.

Those of us who believe that God has given a sufficient pattern for all ages seek to restore the old church - that is, the church as it was built by the Lord.

To restore the church simply means to go back to the church as it was before men departed from the faith by

planting other seed than God’s Word. When men began to sow new seed, they produced a great monstrosity of a plant that had no resemblance to the Lord’s plant. The reason there are so many denominations today is because such a variety of seed has been sown over the years.

The Bible alone must always decide every question involving the nature, the character or the designs of the church. Hence, to restore the church, one simply must return to the New Testament. To become members of the church people must obey the Lord; they must believe, repent, confess Christ, and be baptized for the remission of sins. When one does this God forgives his sins and adds him to the church.

The Word of God produces nothing but the church of Christ.

We do our best to plant the old seed, believing that it will produce after its kind. It will produce the kingdom of heaven.

“Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers . . . And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:37-42, 47b.) “But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.” (Acts 8:12.)

Human Suffering And God’s Wrath

By Joe Slater

Atheists claim that human suffering proves there is no God. On the other extreme, some who believe in God assert that human suffering is always the result of God’s wrath upon the one who is suffering. Truth, as we might expect, lies between the extremes.

Before sin occurred in Eden, there was no sickness, no pain, no hurricanes, no fires, no death. Beyond dispute, God allows such things to be commonplace now because of sin. That is not to say, however, that every episode of suffering is due to divine wrath against the sufferer!

Much of the misunderstanding stems from the false doctrine of inherited sin. I have engaged in discussions with people who believed little babies are born guilty of Adam’s sin, and therefore God afflicts them with terrible diseases! But God Himself told Ezekiel that “the son shall not bear the guilt of the father.” (Ezekiel 18:20.) God’s own law given to Israel through Moses forbade punishing children for

the crimes of parents. (Deuteronomy 24:16.)

Job’s friends foolishly assumed his suffering was God’s way of punishing him for his sins. The Twelve likewise presumed that a man’s blindness from birth might be due to his parents’ sin. (John 9:2.) The Lord corrected all of them.

Everyone has known of cases where the innocent suffer due to the sins of the guilty. Drunk drivers kill the innocent and walk away unscathed. Drug-addicted parents spend money on drugs while innocent children go without food and clothes.

Yes, suffering characterizes the world because of sin. But that does not mean every case of suffering is due to God’s wrath against the sufferer. - Justin, TX

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness

for His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” (Psalm 23:1-4.)

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