



WIN Program: Witnessing in Neighborhoods

Advanced Class on Jehovah's Witnesses

Week Four: What is Hell and The State of the Dead



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MM Outreach Inc

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The State of the Dead

Death is a fascinating subject. We are born to die. We will die, early, mid, or late life or any day in-between, expected or unexpected. All of us are a heartbeat away from eternity. Unless the Lord comes and takes us away while we are still living, we will face death. Death is the last enemy we will face. No wonder 1 Corinthians 15:26 says, "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death".

Lest I sound too gloomy, let me state that all this pessimism on the subject of death is for unbelievers or the uninformed only. The Christian has a different attitude, which is stated in Philippians 1:21,

"For me to live is Christ, and to - die is gain". We as Christians know that "...to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord" as 2 Corinthians 5:8 says.

It is not so in the world in general, nor in the world of the cults. Let's look at the variations on the teaching of annihilationism taught in concert with "soul sleep".

Annihilation comes from the Latin word "nihil" meaning "Nothing". In other words, the human soul ceases to exist at death. There are even three variations on this teaching.

1. Materialism: Gone, done, nothing further,,, annihilated.
2. Conditional immortality: Teaches that although humans are naturally mortal, God imparts to the redeemed immortality, but the rest of humanity is annihilated completely.
3. Annihilationism proper: Man is created immortal, fulfills his destiny in salvation (except for the reprobates who fall into nonexistence either through a direct act of God or through the corrosive effect of evil either way they cease to exist.)

There is another view, Universalism, which teaches that God will finally redeem everybody.

The cults usually fall into condition 2, "conditional immortality" or 3, "Annihilationsim proper, or some condition similar to the two.... some can be saved after death, the rest are annihilated. Any view encompassing annihilationism involves the denial of the immortality of the soul. Therefore at death, the soul either "sleeps" or is out of existence, since the soul is only the person, nothing more, in their view.

Jehovah's Witnesses have this to say under the heading "Condition of Human Dead" in their Aid to Bible Understanding page 431.

"The dead are shown to be "conscious of nothing at all" and the death state to be one of complete inactivity.

(Eccl. 9"5, 10; Ps. 146:4). In both the Hebrew and the Greek Scriptures death is likened to sleep, a fitting comparison, not only due to the unconscious condition of the dead, but also because of the hope of an awakening through the resurrection...".

So, according to the JW's, and also the Seventh-day Adventists, who have common roots, the dead are sleeping, the soul also is dead, until such time that God "awakens" them through "resurrection". Realize that by "resurrection", they really mean "re-creation" since the person is, in reality, in their doctrine, cloned from God's memory.

To the JW's, and groups like them, the soul is just the person (You say "poor soul" you mean the person) and the spirit is just their breath, nothing more. Let's turn to the Bible to get at the truth about the definition of the Soul and the Spirit.

The Soul and the Spirit

Are the soul and the spirit the same? If not, what makes them different? Many believe that the terms "soul" and "spirit" are interchangeable terms, when, in fact, the Bible shows a difference.

We are created in the image of God according to the Bible. Just as our God is a Triune Being, so are we. We are composed of Body, Soul, and Spirit. Let's confirm this fact by considering 1 Thessalonians 5:23,

"Now may the God of Peace Himself sanctify you entirely, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

So, to be sanctified ENTIRELY and preserved COMPLETE, our total self is involved... body, soul, and spirit.

Dividing the Soul and the Spirit

The soul and the spirit are not the same, as the Bible speaks of a division between the two. Hebrews 4:12 says,

"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

Not only is this Scripture a marvelous revelation of the power of the word of God to change lives, but it shows that the piercing power of the word can divide between the soul and spirit. Thus, they are not synonymous terms, they are different.

The Body

We all know what the body is, namely our flesh and bones, circulation and nervous systems, governed by our brain, and dependent on the good functioning of our heart and lungs. It is the physical us.

The Soul

What, then is the Soul? The soul is NOT the body, nor the spirit, but is everything else these two are not. We will define the spirit next, but in brief, the soul is our intellect, our personality, in fact, our identity.

The first mention of the soul in the Bible is in Genesis 2:7, where it is recorded that Adam BECAME a living soul. Notice that Adam did not RECEIVE a soul, Adam became a soul. Many Bible translations interchange the words "soul", "person", and "life", and this is correct, since a soul can touch, according to Leviticus 5:2, a soul can commit a sin, according to Leviticus 5:15, and a soul can also eat according to Leviticus 7:18. Psalms 42:2 records that our soul can "thirst for God".

The Soul Departing

Genesis 35:18 records concerning Rachel in childbirth that,

"it came about as her soul was departing, for she died, that she called him... "Benjamin".

So, the soul goes out at death. We would reasonably expect that if the soul goes out at death as the Bible teaches, then if it returns, the person would live. In 1 Kings 17:21,22 Elijah the prophet entreats the Lord to raise a boy from the dead.

"Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and called to the Lord and said, "O Lord my God, I pray Thee, let the child's life (or Soul) return to him" and the Lord heard the voice of Elijah and the life (soul) of the child returned to him and he revived".

Isaiah 53:12 records that Christ *"poured out His soul unto death."* The soul goes out at death according to the Bible.

Where Does the Soul Go?

Some have attempted to prove from scripture that the soul goes out to annihilation. This is false. They use for their so-called Scriptural proof the scripture in Ezekiel 18:4, which reads, "The soul who sins will die". The word "die" in the Bible does not signify annihilation as the cults teach, or so-called "soul sleep" in an unconscious state.

Following our fleshly death and the going out of our soul, we will spend a conscious eternity in one of two places, just as Jesus taught. We go to the grave. Proverbs 23:14

tells us if we discipline our children properly, we will deliver their soul from Sheol or the grave. Prophetically it was said of Jesus in Psalms 16:10

"For Thou will not abandon my soul to Sheol; neither wilt Thou allow thy Holy One to undergo decay".

So, the grave is not the end, there is yet a deliverance out of it.

Two Destinations for the Soul

The soul departing for Sheol (Hades) could end up finally in the dreadful Gehenna, the Lake of Fire.

"And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades (Sheol, grave), gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every one of them according to their deeds."(Revelation 20:13)

The other, much better alternative destination is in heaven. Revelation 6:9 records this scene in heaven.

"And when He broke the fifth seal I saw underneath the altar the SOULS of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained."

Notice, please, that here were persons who had been SLAIN, that is, their bodies had been killed, and yet their souls were safe in heaven. Some cult groups teach that the soul is the body and suffers death. Not so, and not true. Matthew 10:28 reads,

"And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell".

Eternal Destinations

It is just as Jesus said of the two classes, first of the goats or the unbelieving wicked, *"And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life"*. (Matthew 25:46).

Our soul will spend eternity somewhere. Have you decided where yours will reside?

What is the spirit of man?

What now is the SPIRIT that the Bible talks about, and in fact gives prominence to over the soul and body? We should be spirit, soul, and body in that order according to 1 Thessalonians 5:23:

"Now may the Lord of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

First off, the teaching of the cult groups that our spirit is merely our breath is ridiculous, and not borne out by a careful examination of Scriptures. What does the Bible teach concerning the spirit of man?

Zechariah 12:1 says this:

"Thus declares the Lord who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him..."

So, man does not BECOME a spirit, but HAS a spirit within him. Isaiah 26:9 says this:

"...at night my soul longs for Thee, indeed my spirit within me seeks Thee diligently".

Our spirit is NOT breath, for the spirit of man is capable of thought. 1 Corinthians 2:11 says,

"For who among men knows the thoughts of a man, except the spirit of the man, which is in him?"

Our spirit can also "perceive" just as Mark 2:8 says of Jesus,

"and immediately Jesus, perceiving in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves said to them, "Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts?"

Ephesians suggests that we renew not only our minds, but our spirits. Clearly, our spirit within us is NOT our breath.

Are "spirit" & "soul" the same?

The spirit of man is the same as the soul in some respects. We are taught in James 2:26 that our body is dead without the spirit. Furthermore, when our spirit returns, our bodies come alive again. (Luke 8:54,55). Nowhere in Scripture does it speak of the spirit being destroyed or dying as it does the soul. What then happens to the spirit within us at our death?

The Spirit at Death

Ecclesiastics 12:7 teaches that the spirit returns to God on death. For this reason we find that David committed his spirit to the Lord in Psalms 31:5. Upon His death, Jesus cried out, "Father into Thy hands I commit My spirit". (Luke 23:46). The Christian martyr Stephen also committed his spirit to the Lord when he died. (Acts 7:59).

What a good pattern for us all to follow! We can commit our spirits to the Lord upon our death in full confidence, provided we have been dealt with spiritually by the Lord prior to our death. We need to experience personally Romans 8:16,

"The Spirit, Himself bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God".

We have all been born once physically, but we all need to be born again spiritually. (John 3:3-7). We need the Holy Spirit to inhabit our spirit, and this is what happens when we invite Jesus Christ into our lives, hearts, and spirits. No wonder Paul said to the godly man Timothy,

"The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you". (2 Tim. 4:22).

The Complete Man

In conclusion, we state again that we are a triune being of spirit, soul, and body. We are born in the reverse order, but when we are born again through the Spirit of God, we can become as God intended us to be, spirit, soul, and body.

In Scripture, remember, that as the spirit goes, so goes the soul. Even our rebellious body of flesh can be brought into line through the power of the Spirit of God. 1 Corinthians 3:16 says,

Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"

We are not complete unless our spirits are renewed. We will not live abundantly if our spirits are unsatisfied. Come to Jesus today, and be satisfied, spirit, soul, and body.

By MM Outreach Inc

WHAT EXACTLY IS HELL?

The subject of "Hell" is usually a hot one. Years ago it was common to hear of sermons scaring people with a fiery hell. Then, in the early 1800's, groups began arising that taught that hell was not a place of eternal torment, nor was it hot!

In place of eternal torment, groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists began teaching "soul sleep", or a state of unconsciousness, but certainly no torment! Mormons changed their earlier views of hellfire to make hell just a place where a person needing it is taught a good lesson on his way to a degree of heavenly glory. What is the truth of the matter concerning the subject of hell? We need to let the Bible be our guide.

Three Words For "Hell"

Most of the confusion surrounding the topic of hell, is because the King James version of the Bible translated three distinct Greek words by the one word "hell". The three Greek words are, "tartaros", "hades" and "gehenna". Only one of these three words refers to the place of eternal torment commonly called "hell", and the other words are often given mistaken meanings. Let's consider these three words and their meanings.

Tartaros

"Tartaros" need not concern us too much since this is a special abode for angels who are confined to this special pit of darkness. The word "tartatos occurs only once in the New Testament, in 2 Peter 2:4.

Hades

"Hades" also translated "hell" occurs ten times in the New Testament, and is referred to by three writers, Matthew, Luke, and John.

The most detailed information we can find out about Hades is in Luke, Chapter 16, where we are told about a rich man and Lazarus. Lazarus died in a righteous condition and the angels took him into Abraham's bosom, to a place of peace and security. The rich man, on the other hand, went to "hades" or "hell", and was in great torment. He was obviously fully conscious of his surroundings, and not in a condition of "soul sleep", for the account in Luke records,

"....The rich man also died and was buried, and in hell [or hades], he lifted up his eyes, being in torment..... " [Luke 16:22, 23].

He pleaded for a drop of water to cool his tongue because of the torment of the flame. He could see the happy condition of Lazarus, but he could not leave his place of torment. He spoke about his worry over the condition of his five brothers who had yet to die. He

wished to spare them his present agony. Yet this pitiful rich man had all his faculties, and was indeed experiencing ongoing torment

Could Luke 16 Be "Only A Parable"?

Groups denying the reality of hellfire do indeed claim that the above account is only a parable or is "figurative" or "spiritual". However this account is not a parable, since proper names of recognizable Bible characters are used, whereas Jesus never used proper names in his parables, and generally indicated when he was teaching a parable.

Even stretching the point, and allowing that it could be a parable, it teaches an important truth, and Jesus taught truth, not falsehoods.

Hades Is Not The Final Destination

"Hades" in Greek, finds its parallel in the Hebrew word "Sheol". Hades and Sheol [both translated "hell"] are often called the "holding tanks" by some Bible scholars, since souls in this "hell" are not in their final destination. According to Revelation, chapter 20, those in Hades will yet stand before the Great White Throne Judgment. Hades will be terminated at this time. Those with condemnatory judgment will be cast into "gehenna" [hell], the Lake that burns with "Fire and Brimstone".

"Hades" or "Sheol" does not mean only the grave as the cult groups teach. That is one meaning for these words, but other original words are used to mean the literal grave with its headstones or pit-marker. "Hades" or "sheol" refers to the condition of the dead, as we considered in Luke, chapter 16. Hades will finally be done away with in God's time, but gehenna will remain.

What Did Jesus Say About Gehenna?

One has only to read the words of Jesus in Mark 9:42-48 to know the seriousness of a final destination of gehenna.

"And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in Me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell [or gehenna], into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

This same warning is issued regarding a foot or an eye that would hinder us, that "the fire would not be quenched", and "the worm would not die". Christ stresses that it would be better to lose the most precious things in this life and to avoid hell, than it would be to retain all that this life holds dear, and be cast into this dreadful place.

Cult groups like to think the fire would annihilate them or consume them, but God is capable of altering the properties of fire. Consider the burning bush of Moses' day that

was not consumed, and also the "fiery furnace" of Daniel's day, where the fire did not consume the inhabitants.

What About Soul Sleep?

A condition of "soul sleep" is obviously not taught by Christ. The inhabitants of hell are not unconscious or annihilated. When we really believe the word of God as it is written, and don't try to "figurize" or "spiritualize" it away as the cults do, it becomes evident that Hell is a very real place of destination, and its inhabitants are conscious. The Bible makes this very clear.

Let's compare Revelation, chapter 19, verse 20, with Chapter 20 and verse 10. Before the 1,000 year reign of Christ, the beast and the false prophet were cast into the lake of fire. Were they annihilated as the cults teach? No, for 1,000 years later, they are still alive, and the Devil joins them in their condition of torment. Scripture says, they; "shall be tormented day and night, forever and ever." [Revelation 20:10].

Let's Believe Jesus

Let's just believe the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 25:46, that there are two destinations, one for believers, and one for unbelievers.

"And these shall go away into eternal punishment; but the righteous into eternal life".

The same exact word in the Greek describes both conditions. Both are "everlasting," "eternal" and "ongoing". We may choose eternal life, or eternal punishment and torment. Denying the reality of Hell won't prevent us from going there, if we wait for our death to find out for sure.

Why Not Choose Eternal Life?

Jesus offers to each one of us a precious gift. It is the gift of eternal life. We receive this gift when we receive Jesus Christ into our hearts. He needs an invitation to come in, issued by us in an attitude of heartfelt repentance for our lives up to this point, which have been devoid of Him. Why not stop right now and pray, inviting Jesus Christ into your life? John 1:12,13 will hold new meaning for you.

"But as many as received Him, to them He GAVE the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God".

Please notice that Jesus does not limit salvation to a chosen few, like 144,000. Jesus opens the door wide so that "...whosoever will may come". The apostle John says "**...as many as received Him" have the right to be sons of God. (John 1:12).**

Now is the time for all of us to turn away from false teachings on the subject of death and hell, and turn to Jesus Christ so we may live eternally with Him.

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