

Dear Phil

IS MY DECEASED LOVED ONE WITH JESUS?

A parishioner of mine wrote me the following letter. Can you help me respond to him?

"The Seventh Day Adventist church I attended told me I was wrong to think that my wife, who recently passed away, is with Jesus. I know the scripture says, "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." Seventh Day Adventists claim the spirit that returns to God at death is not a conscious entity, but the breath of life (Ecclesiastes 12:7; Genesis 2:7). The Bible says the dead cannot remember or give thanks (Psalm 6:5), cannot praise God (Psalm 115:17; Isaiah 38:18), cannot think (Psalm 146:3, 4), and cannot function (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6, 10). Their abode is the grave, not heaven (Acts 2:29,34). The Bible teaches death is an unconscious cessation of life.

"They question, 'Why have a resurrection at all?' Jesus' and the Bible teaching about resurrection would be utterly absurd and illogical, would it not, were it true that when a person dies he doesn't really die? If that were the case, what would be the point of Jesus going through the motions of purporting a resurrection for Lazarus in the first place? If Lazarus had already been in heaven, why did Jesus raise him from the dead?

"When I read the scriptures they quote above, I think they raise some good points, but I'm still not sure. Would it really matter what I thought about death and where people go?

"SDAs say what happens to you after you die is important, because if you believe dead people are cognitive you will believe in the delusion that you can communicate with the dead and leave yourself open to influence from Satan and his followers."

Thanks a million! —John

Dear John,

Here are my thoughts:

1. Moses died (Deut. 34:5,7). Moses appears alive and aware enough of what was happening in Jesus' life to talk to him about his coming departure (Greek: exodus) from earth (Luke 9:30-31).

2. If the dead have no consciousness, the story about the rich man and Lazarus has no basis in reality and its point(s) collapse—e.g., the rich man would not ask an unconscious person to come to him and give him water; the rich man would not be talking at all, and so on.

3. Paul's struggle between death and life in Philippians 1 seems ludicrous if there is no consciousness until the resurrection. How could he say it is far better to be with the Lord when he would not be with Him any sooner than the Philippians would be, since all the dead will be raised together?

Regarding the passages that say the dead have no knowledge, do not praise, etc., the psalmist's frame of reference is earthly existence. It is not an absolute statement. It's true, dead bodies don't talk. If they do, there's something wrong!

But why have a resurrection? Ah, good question. I offer the following answers:

1. Because resurrection is about reuniting the body with the spirit. Redemption is not purely spiritual. God's plan of redemption encompasses the entire created universe.

2. When we die our spirit goes to heaven or hell, but our body remains unconscious, unknowing in the grave, and decays to dust. But a disembodied state is unnatural for humans, and God intends to reunite our glorified spirits with immortal, glorified bodies to use in service to Him throughout eternity.

So, does believing that believers' spirits go to heaven after death open us to Satanic delusion through trying to communicate with the dead? Not at all! God specifically prohibits attempts to communicate with the dead (Deut. 18:10; Gal. 5:20; Rev. 22:15); therefore, believers will reject all forms of necromancy as sinful and not of God.

I hope that is helpful.

Blessings,
Philip

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