

The False Teachings of Soul Sleep and Annihilation of the Soul, and the Reality of an Eternal Hell

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The doctrine of hell is a doctrine that is very infrequently mentioned in churches and Christian circles anymore. Evangelical seeker sensitive churches avoid the subject at all costs, even at the cost of lost souls. We must not omit mention of the eternal hell and its horrors of eternal hell fire, because Jesus did not omit it (Mark 9:43-48).

Let us examine the false doctrines of soul sleep and annihilation of the soul. Soul sleep teaches that the soul sleeps, or has no awareness, until the time of future resurrection. The doctrine is commonly associated with the Seventh Day Adventists, and is supposedly based on verses such as Ecclesiastes 9:5 and 12:7, which are removed from the context of the book, in which Solomon presents the human perspective, not the theological perspective (1:1-3). Some will appeal to 1 Thessalonians 4:14-16 which uses the word "sleep", but in doing so show their ignorance of the fact that "sleep" is a euphemism for bodily death in the New Testament, as in John 11:11-14. Annihilation of the soul takes it a step further, teaching that the soul of the unbeliever is destroyed, and does not continue to suffer in hell eternally. The doctrine is commonly associated with the Jehovah's Witnesses and Liberal Theology, and relies primarily on Matthew 10:28 and 2 Peter 3:7, which seem to teach the destruction of the soul of the unbeliever. These verses, however, need not be interpreted as final destruction. Rather, they should be understood to be speaking of ongoing eternal destruction. Otherwise, we would have to deny the clear teaching of many other Scriptures, which we cannot do, for the Bible has no contradictions.

Now let us affirm the true Bible teaching on the subject of the eternal and continuing existence of the soul. The clearest teaching that the consciousness of the soul continues immediately after death for both believers and unbelievers is found in Luke 16:19-31. There we find Jesus telling a historical story, stating various facts. In this story, we find both Lazarus (a believer) and a rich man (an unbeliever) clearly conscious after death. In Matthew 17:1-4, we find Moses not in soul sleep, but conscious. In 2 Corinthians 5:8, we are taught that "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord" as the truth of after death existence of believers. Daniel 12:2 teaches everlasting judgment in the Old Testament. Jesus teaches both bodily resurrection and eternal, continuing torment of the lost in several places, most notably Mark 9:43-48 (where He repeats the truth three times for emphasis), but also in Matthew 5:30, 13:49-50, 25:46, and John 5:28-29, to give a few references. Paul, Peter, and John are also consistent in their Scripture teaching on the subject. Revelation 20:10-15 is quite clear that torment in hell is real, involves punishment by fire, and is eternal in duration. Other Scriptures that teach this in the New Testament are 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9, 2 Peter 2:9, and Revelation 14:11.