

SPIRIT, BREATH, SOUL

Spirit and Breath

Job 27 points out that the “spirit” and the “breath” is the same. Job further states that this spirit or breath is in his nostrils. Please remember that it was the “breath” that God placed in Adam’s nostrils at creation, Genesis 2:7. So the spirit that returns to God when a person dies is the breath of life. Keep in mind that the spirit, or breath, returns to God, at death, but not the disembodied soul. Never in the Bible is the disembodied soul said to return to God at death.

The word “breath,” here is not referring to one’s common breathing, but breath as the “divine spark of life.” It is this breath or “divine spark of life” that returns to God at death. Only God has the power to create life and He retains that power exclusively.

Soul

At creation, two things combine to make a soul: body and breath. Until these two things combine a soul does NOT exist. At death, these two things (body and breath) separate. The body returns to dust and the breath returns to God, and once again, the soul no longer exists. The soul goes nowhere at death. It simply ceases to be. (1+1=2. If you took away a 1 then the 2 would cease to be, in fact the whole equation would not make sense.)

A simple illustration may help clarify this point. Suppose that I combine wood and nails and make a box: wood plus nails equals a box. Then suppose that I no longer want the box so I pull out the nails and put them in a pile, and stack the wood in another place. What happens to the box? Where does it go? It goes nowhere. It simply ceases to be. The box is the combination of two things. There is no such thing as a box, unless wood and nails are combined to make it. The nails and wood still exist, but there is no box until the two are joined together. So, with the soul: the breath exists and the body returns to dust, but the soul does not exist unless the two are combined.

Death, Soul and Spirit

Death is not life in heaven, hell, limbo or purgatory. It is not life of any kind, anywhere. In death, the soul does not live, the spirit does not live. No shadowy substance of any kind lives. It is the exact opposite of life - death.

The words “soul” and “spirit” are used over 1600 times in the Bible, but not once are either given any life or personality or wisdom or knowledge when separated from the body.

The word “soul” does have other basic meanings in the Bible. Usually it means a person or living being, Genesis 2:7 (compare Genesis 12:5 with 36:6), but sometimes “life”, Job 12:10. And sometimes it simply means the “mind” or “intellect”, Psalm 139:14. In all cases, however, the definition is the same: body plus breath equals soul. And in all cases the soul does not exist when body and breath are separated. Many English words have several meanings, but this is not confusing: the context usually clarifies which meaning is intended.

SLEEP AND ETERNAL LIFE

Sleep

Sleep is a beautiful illustration of death. It is like going to bed at night, when we are tired, with assurance of waking in the morning. This takes the fear out of death for the Christian. They lie down to sleep - with the quiet assurance that Jesus will awaken them in the morning of the resurrection at His second coming.

Death is called ‘sleep’ at least 50 times in the Bible. We are to regard it as a sound, dreamless sleep. A person may have been in the tomb 1000 years, but when raised at the resurrection it will seem to them that they merely dozed off for a moment. When angels meet God’s resurrected saints at their gravesides, Matthew 24:31, it will be like a loving mother greeting her child after a brief nap.

Eternal life

Man is not immortal [Jesus has immortality (1 Timothy 6 15,16.) Man is subject to death, but God’s people do have eternal life now. Eternal life is that miraculous new Jesus-filled life which begins at conversion and will be continued in heaven. God’s promise is that His faithful people, who now have eternal life, will not suffer the second death [Revelation 2:11], from which there is no resurrection. The first death, which all must die, does not remove the gift of eternal life. It only interrupts it while the saints sleep briefly. It continues in heaven after the resurrection.