

Of the Separate State of the Soul Until the Resurrection, and Its Employment in That State.

by John Gill

The soul exists in a future state after death and is employed in various exercises, with the righteous dead being delivered from sin and Satan's temptations and immediately admitted into the presence of God.

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 4:2, Isaiah 57:1

Topics: "Afterlife", "Consciousness of the Soul"

Description

John Gill emphasizes the immediate state of the soul after death, asserting that it enters a realm of either happiness or misery, actively engaging in worship and communion with God rather than falling into insensibility. He argues that the righteous are welcomed into God's presence, experiencing joy and peace, while the wicked face judgment and torment. Gill supports his claims with various scriptures, illustrating that the soul remains conscious and active, participating in divine worship and awaiting the resurrection. He highlights the importance of understanding this separate state to grasp the full scope of God's plan for humanity. Ultimately, Gill reassures believers of the hope and joy that awaits them after death.

Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 7--Chapter 3

OF THE SEPARATE STATE OF THE SOUL UNTIL THE RESURRECTION,

and its Employment in that State

That the soul exists in a future state, after the death of the body, has been abundantly proved in the preceding chapter; and the business of this is to show, that the soul, immediately after death, enters into a state of happiness or woe; in which it continues until the resurrection of the body: and that during that interval, it is not in a state of insensibility and inactivity; but that it is employed in various exercises; and what its employment is, will be pointed at. 1.

First, that as soon as the body is dead, the soul immediately enters into a separate state of happiness or misery. The wise man, after a description of death, and the symptoms of it, in a most beautiful and striking manner; adds, "Then shall the dust return to the earth;" the body, composed of dust and earth, at death, returns to its original dust and earth, and is interred in it, where it sleeps until the resurrection; and "the spirit," or soul, which is a spiritual, immaterial, and immortal substance, "shall return," even immediately, as soon as the body is become a lifeless lump of clay, "unto God that gave it;" the former of the spirit of man within him, the giver of it to the sons of men, to whom it returns as soon as it leaves the body, as to the original proprietor of it; and to whom it is accountable for all actions done in the body; being summoned and gathered by him, or carried by angels to him; when a particular, personal judgment passes upon it; for "after this," that is, death, comes "judgment;" that at once takes place; though the general judgment will not be until the resurrection of the dead; and according to the sentence passed on the soul, at its particular judgment, is it disposed of.

The souls of the wicked are sent down to hell, and cast into it; to this prison they are committed, there to remain to the judgment of the great day: this has been the case from the beginning of the world, witness the spirits in prison, who were disobedient in the times of Noah; the wicked of all nations in the world, in all ages, as asserted by David; and that without respect to persons, rich or poor; the rich wicked man died, and in hell lift up his eyes, according to the parable of our Lord (1 Pet. 3:19; Ps. 9:17; Luke 16:22).

And the souls of good men return to God at death, are retained by him, into whose hands, at death, they commit them; and are immediately admitted into his presence, and fulness of joy there; and so remain until the second coming of Christ, when he will bring them with him, raise their bodies, and reunite souls and bodies; and when in both, they shall be for ever with him: and whereas the immediate state of the wicked after death, is but sparingly spoken of in scripture; but that of good men more plentifully, the proof of the latter will be chiefly attended to, and which may be taken, 1a.

First, from Ecclesiastes 4:2 where the saints dead are preferred to living ones. 1a1. By the "dead" are meant the righteous dead; for though the righteousness of Christ, from which they are denominated righteous, delivers them from eternal death, yet not from a corporal one; "The righteous man perishes," or dies, as others do; though his death is different from the death of others, and is attended with happy circumstances; hence Balaam desired to die the death of "the righteous" (Num. 23:10). 1a2.

By the living, are meant saints in the present state, who are distressed with a body of sin and death, and groan, being burdened with it; are harassed by the temptations of Satan, with which they are sorely grieved; are exercised with a variety of afflictions, from different quarters, and on different accounts; meet with various tribulations in the world, and are greatly oppressed with the persecutions of men, as in Numbers 23:1 which makes their present state uncomfortable at times.

Now, 1a3. The righteous dead are delivered from all these; they are freed from sin, and are out of the reach of Satan's temptations, and of the persecutions and oppressions of men. And, 1a4. Are in a state of fellowship with God, and Christ, and with angels and glorified saints, in heaven, and so happy, and in a state preferable to living saints. But, 1a5. If this was not the case, if they were in a state of insensibility, and without the enjoyment of the divine presence; they would not be happier than, nor so happy, as living saints, with all their sorrows, arising from within and from without; for they have their intervals of joy, peace, and comfort; have the love of God shed abroad in their hearts, by the Spirit, at times; and are indulged with fellowship with the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ: and besides, they have comfortable fellowship with the saints, in the word and ordinances; with whom they go to the house of God in

company, and are there greatly delighted and refreshed: the tabernacles of the Lord are amiable and lovely; a day in his courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.

Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and her paths, paths of peace; and therefore they are happier than the righteous dead, if they are not in the divine Presence, and sensibly enjoying that, until the resurrection. 1b. Secondly, from Isaiah 57:1,2. "The righteous perisheth," &c. 1b1. By the righteous and merciful, are meant such as are truly made so by the righteousness of Christ, and live righteously under a sense of such grace, and who have obtained pardoning mercy of God, and show mercy to others; the same with the good man, the godly, and the faithful, elsewhere (Micah 7:2; Ps. 12:1). 1b2.

The death of such is meant by their "perishing," and being "taken away;" for persons so described can never perish eternally, only as to the outward man, and the transitory things of this world; out of which they are taken by death, and to God himself. And 1b3. As soon as they are taken from hence, they are at once in a state of happiness; being not only taken from evil to come, from public judgments and calamities coming upon a nation; or from the evil of sin, and of error, by which they might have been ensnared and distressed; all which is a kind of negative happiness; but they have, besides this, at death, a real and positive happiness, which they are at once possessed of; signified by the following things, 1b3a.

They "enter into peace:" are not only freed from sorrow, disturbance, and distress, on any account whatever; but they are put into the possession of a peace which passeth all understanding, and can never be interrupted; they enter into it as into an house, where they are to dwell; and upon a land where there is no pricking brier nor grieving thorn. 1b3b. They "rest in their beds;" not only their bodies rest in their graves, where their rest together is in the dust; but their souls in the bosom of Abraham, in the arms of Jesus; where they rest from all their toil and labour; and have continual and never ceasing communion with all the heavenly inhabitants. 1b3c.

They "walk" in their "uprightness;" they "walk," and so are not in a state of insensibility and inactivity; they have "places" given them to "walk among those that stand by," to take their turns, and converse with angels and glorified saints; and with them they walk clothed in white, because worthy, through the worthiness of Christ; in the righteousness of Christ, the fine linen, clean and white; and in spotless purity and holiness; and in the shining robes of bliss and glory. 1c.

Thirdly, from Luke 16:22,23. "And it came to pass that the beggar died," &c. The scope of this parable, as observed in the preceding chapter, is to be attended to; which is to set forth the immediate state of men after death, whether good men or bad men; for though it may have a principal respect to Christ, and to the Pharisees of his times, yet holds true of all good men, the members of Christ; and of all wicked men, whether under a guise of religion, or openly profane. 1c1.

The beggar, the good man, upon his death, is represented as under the care and convoy of angels, and by them seated in Abraham's bosom, a phrase used by the Jews, expressive of the heavenly happiness; in allusion to a feast, at which, according to the custom of the Jews, the guests lay upon beds, or couches, about the table; so that he who lay below another, and next to him, leaned, as it were, on his breast, and lay in his bosom; and this denotes the intimate communion of the saints with each other, in the enjoyment of God. 1c2.

The rich and wicked man, he is said, upon his death, to be "in hell," where he lift up his eyes, and saw the poor good man in great felicity and comfort, whom he had treated with neglect and contempt; which served to aggravate his misery; and where he found himself surrounded with the flames of hell, and filled

with inward torments and horrors of mind. 1c3. The state of both these is summed up in a few words (Luke 16:25). "But now he is comforted, and thou art tormented;" even "now," immediately after the death of both.

And, 1c4. That this respects the intermediate state between the death of the body, and the resurrection of it, is clear, from what the wicked man petitioned, on the behalf of his brethren in his father's house, in the state of the living, and having the means, the law and the prophets; only he thought, if one sent from the dead to them, it would strike them with greater conviction; when he was told, they would not be persuaded, though one rose from the dead; which shows the parable respects the state of men before the resurrection, and as taking place immediately upon death. 1d.

Fourthly, from Luke 23:43. "And Jesus said unto him," the repentant thief, then suffering death; "verily I say unto thee," which being thus solemnly affirmed might be depended on, "today thou shalt be with me in paradise," in heaven! for, 1d1. By paradise is meant the third heaven, into which the apostle Paul was caught (2 Cor. 12:2, 4), the seat of the divine Majesty, and the dwelling place of angels and glorified saints; so called in allusion to the garden of Eden, that earthly paradise, for the delight, pleasure, and happiness of it. 1d2.

Hither Christ himself, as soon as he expired on the cross, went; not into "limbus patrum," to deliver the Old Testament saints from thence; nor into the prison of hell, to preach to, and convert the spirits there, as say the papists, upon the mistaken sense of 1 Peter 3:19 but into heaven itself, having commended his spirit, or soul, into the hands of his divine Father, by whom it was received. And, 1d3. The happiness promised the thief, upon his request to him, to remember him in his kingdom, is, that he should be with him in paradise; should enjoy all the happiness of that place, and his presence in it, in which the happiness of it lay.

And, 1d4. He assures him, that this happiness he should enjoy immediately, that very day; "This day thou shalt be with me," &c. to put the stop after "today," and read it as connected with what goes before, "I say unto thee today," is a mere shift, and gives a most trifling and jejune sense of the words. 1e. Fifthly, from 2 Corinthians 5:1-8. "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens".

In which may be observed, 1e1. That death is signified by a dissolution of the earthly body; that is called a tabernacle, or tent, set up for a while, and then taken down; and an "earthly house," an house of clay, formed out of the earth, which has its foundation in the dust; and death is an analysis, or resolution of it, into earth and dust again. 1e2. Heaven is represented as another house of a different nature, not made with the hands of men; but what God is the maker and builder of; and it is not on earth, but in heaven; is eternal, will continue for ever; it consists of many mansions and apartments, prepared by Christ for his people. 1e3.

Into which they are at once removed, when dislodged from their earthly house, the body; "We know, that if," or "when our earthly house," &c. when we are warned out of that, we have another house immediately to be admitted into; saints are not, at death, turned adrift, as Adam, when drove out of Eden; nor are they without any certain dwelling place, as sometimes the apostles were; they have an house ready for them to go into; as soon as they are ordered out of one, there is another prepared to receive them. 1e4.

This is no conjecture, but a certain thing; "We know," from the provision God has made of it, from the preparations of Christ for it, from the right and title Christ's righteousness gives unto it, from the security of

it in him, and from the testimony of the Spirit. 1e5. After which there are strong desires in the saints; they groan in the present tabernacle, being burdened, longing for a deliverance from it, and an admittance into their other house in heaven; being willing to quit the body, that they might enjoy the presence of God; which they would not be so pressingly desirous of, if they knew they should not be introduced into it immediately. 1e6.

But of this they have an earnest, even the Spirit of God; and therefore are quite confident, being wrought up by him for this self-same thing, by his power and grace, that when they are removed from hence they shall be with the Lord. 1e7. And this will be as soon as they are absent from the body, as they are at death, they shall be present with the Lord, and enjoy communion with him. 1f. Sixthly, from Philippians 1:21,23. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain--for I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better!"

From whence it appears, 1f1. That the apostle believed, that upon his departure out of this world, by death, he should be immediately with Christ, and enjoy communion with him; which would be a real gain unto him, and be preferable to his continuance in this life, there being nothing here that could be a counterbalance to it. Or otherwise, 1f2. If he had not believed this, his immediate admission into the presence of Christ, and enjoyment of eternal happiness, he could never have considered death as gain unto him; for he must have been a loser by it; since in his present state, notwithstanding all his fatigue and labour, his sorrows and his sufferings, yet he had communion with God, the presence of Christ, the teachings and leadings of the divine Spirit, much pleasure and success in his work, being the happy instrument of converting sinners, and comforting saints; all which he would be deprived of, if at death he entered into a state of insensibility and inactivity.

Nor, 1f3. Would he have been at a loss what choice to have made, whether to live or die; whether to depart out of the world, or to continue in it; he could have easily discerned, that it was his interest to abide in the flesh, or in the present state, in which he received much good for himself, and did much for others; whereas, if he was not to enter upon a state of happiness until the resurrection, but remain inactive and useless; it certainly was much more eligible to continue as he was.

For, 1f4. Most certain it is, that it would have been better for the churches of Christ, for the interest of religion, and for the glory of God, if he had remained on earth to this day, and so on to the second coming of Christ, than to be sleeping in his grave, receiving no benefit to himself, nor being of any use to others. 1g. Seventhly, from Revelation 14:13. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord," &c. 1g1. By "the dead that die in the Lord," are not meant merely, or only, the martyrs of Jesus, who die for the sake of Christ, and his gospel; but all the saints who die in union with Christ, in faith in him, as the only Saviour and Redeemer; in hope of eternal life by him; and in expectation of being for ever with him; and whose faith, hope, and expectation, will not fail, nor be disappointed. 1g2.

Truly good men are blessed now; they are blessed who trust in the Lord, and make him their hope; they are happy who dwell in his house, enjoy his ordinances, and are employed in his service; who walk in his ways, and keep his commandments: but they are much more blessed at death; which would not be their case, if they did not immediately enter into the presence of and into the joy of the Lord. And, 1g3. This is the blessedness intended here; for it commences "from henceforth," from the instant of their death; and which is confirmed by the testimony of the Spirit; "Yea, saith the Spirit;" he says, they are blessed from that time; which blessedness, 1g4.

Lies in a "rest from their labours;" not merely in a rest from the labours of their bodies, much less in a cessation from the spiritual exercises of their souls; but in inward everlasting peace, joy, and comfort; and in "their works following them," not only what they had done as witnesses of the truth of grace, but what they were to do, and be employed in, until the coming of Christ; which leads to consider the proof that may be given, 2. Secondly, that the souls of men, when separated from their bodies by death, are not in a state of insensibility and inactivity.

There are some, who, though they do not deny the immortality of the soul, yet think it sleeps with the body until the resurrection; and this was the firm opinion of Socinus, as he himself says,[1] that the soul of man, after this life, does not so subsist of itself, as to be sensible either of rewards or punishments; or, indeed, as to be capable of perceiving those things; and the same is held by some Arminian[2] writers. But in opposition to this notion, and some that Calvin calls Catabaptists, and who go by the name of soul sleepers with us,[3] 2a.

First, I shall endeavour to prove, that the soul is operative, and in a state of action, when separate from the body; and that insensibility is not to be concluded from the absence of the body. For, 2a1. The soul can and does operate without the use of bodily organs in its present state, and in many things stands in no need of them; the rational soul thinks, discourses, and reasons without the use of them; its powers and faculties, the understanding and will, need them not; the will is directed and guided by the understanding; and the understanding has to do with objects in the consideration of which bodily organs are no ways assisting; as in the consideration of God, his nature and perfections; of angels and spirits, and their nature; and of a man's own spirit, and the things of it, which it penetrates into without the help of any of the instruments of the body: it can consider of things past long ago, and of things very remote and at a great distance; and such objects as are presented to it by the senses, it reasons about them without making use of any of the organs of the body; and if it can operate without the body, it can exist without it; for since it is independent of it in its operations, it is independent of it in its being; and as it can exist without it, it can act in that separate state of existence without it: wherefore since it dies not with the body, it is not affected as to its operations by the absence of it, nor at death becomes insensible as that is. 2a2.

The case of persons in raptures, ecstasies and trances, when the body is senseless and inactive, and as if it was dead, and yet the soul is active and attentive, and capable of receiving things communicated to it, shows most clearly the soul can operate without the body; and if in this state, much more in a more perfect one. The apostle John was in the spirit, in an ecstasy, when he saw and heard the various things recorded in the Book of the Revelation; the case of the apostle Paul is very remarkable, a particular account of which he gives, though not knowing whether in the body or out of it (2 Cor. 12:2-4), now though the apostle was not certain whether his soul was in his body or not, during his rapture; yet this appears most certain, that it was his sentiment that a soul out of the body is capable of seeing such things as he did; or otherwise it would have been no difficulty with him to have determined whether he was in or out of the body; for if he could not hear and see such things as he did out of the body, then he must without all doubt be in the body when he heard and saw them; but his way of speaking clearly shows that he thought his soul was capable of attending to these things, though it might be out of it; and if this is the same with the trance recorded in Acts 22:17-21 as some think, it appears that while he was in it, and his body lay senseless and inactive, his soul had a sight of Christ, and a conversation with him, and received a mission from him to the Gentiles.

Now if the soul is not in a state of insensibility when the body sometimes now is, there is no reason to believe it is in such a state when the body is dead and separated from it; since the body in an ecstasy is of

no more use to it, nor the organs of it, than if it was dead. 2a3. The soul, freed from the body, must be more capable of exercising its powers and faculties, and be more active than when in it; especially as it is corrupted with sin, and encumbered with it, which is a clog and hindrance in the performance of spiritual duties; it cannot attend to it as it would; "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak;" but when it is separated from the body, and is joined to the spirits of just men made perfect, it must be much more capable of serving God with greater activity, spirituality, joy, and pleasure. 2a4.

The soul separate from the body is most like unto the angels, and its state, condition, and employment, greatly resemble theirs. Now nothing is more foreign to angels than insensibility and inactivity, who always behold the face of God, stand ready to do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word; and no sooner do they receive orders from him, but they do his pleasure; they are continually before the throne of God, praising his name, and celebrating his perfections. 2a5.

If the souls of believers after death are in a state of insensibility and inactivity, their case would be much worse than that of the living, as has been observed; since in the present state, amidst all their evil things, they enjoy much good, receive much from God, and have much spiritual peace and joy in the exercise of grace; whereas there is a stop put to all this, and an entire cessation from it, if upon death they enter into a state of insensibility and inactivity; particularly it would have been much more happy for the apostle Paul to have stayed on earth, and continued here till Christ came again; and more to the advantage of the churches of Christ, than to be where he is, if insensible and inactive; here he might have made use of his great talents, exercised his graces, had much communion with God, and been of great service in the interest of Christ, in which he would have found a real pleasure, but now deprived of all, if the above is his case. 2a6.

If the souls of truly gracious persons are, upon their departure from hence, insensible and inactive, what is become of the work of grace upon their souls? in what condition is it, and must that be? there must be a full stop to it, and to the exercise of it, and that for a long season; where is growth in grace, where no grace is to be seen? and when it might have been expected it would be in its full perfection, does not appear at all?[4] How does this "well of water spring up into everlasting life," when it does not spring at all, but the streams of it cease to flow? what a chasm must there be between grace and glory, when the scriptures represent them as closely and inseparably connected together? grace is the beginning of glory, and glory is the finishing and perfection of grace, and in which there is no interruption. 2a7.

The proof that has been given of souls separate from the body entering immediately into a state of happiness or misery, is also an abundant proof of their sensibility; when either they enter into the presence of God, are with Christ, and feel unutterable pleasure and delight; or are in inexpressible torments under the lighting down of the arm of God's wrath and indignation upon them. I proceed, 2b. Secondly, to take notice of what is urged in favour of the insensibility of souls upon their departure. 2b1.

All such passages of scripture are urged which speak of persons "sleeping" when they die; as of sleeping with their fathers, and of sleeping in the dust of the earth, phrases frequently to be met with in the Old Testament; and of Christ being the firstfruits of those that slept, and of sleeping in Jesus; and of some not sleeping, which are used in the New Testament(2 Sam. 7:12; 1 Kings 1:21; Job 7:21; Dan. 12:2; 1 Cor. 15:18, 51; 1 Thess. 4:14). But, 2b1a. By sleep in all these passages death itself is meant.

It was a way of speaking much used in the eastern countries, and is expressive of the death of the body, and of that only; so to "sleep with the fathers," is to die as they did, and to be buried with them; and to

"sleep in the dust," is, being dead, to be laid in the grave, to be interred in the dust of the earth; and to "sleep in Jesus," is to die in the Lord. When Christ said, "our friend Lazarus sleepeth," he meant that he was dead; and when the apostle Paul says, "we shall not all sleep," he designs nothing else but that we shall not all die; for those who are alive at Christ's coming will be changed; the reason why death is expressed by sleep is, because sleep is the image of death, it locks up the senses, gives rest to the weary body, is but for a time, and then it awakes again. 2b1b.

Death being designed by those expressions, if they prove anything in this controversy they prove too much; for if they prove that the soul sleeps with the body, they would prove that the soul dies with it, since by sleep is meant no other than death. 2b1c. No mention is made of the soul in any of these passages; it is not said of that neither that it sleeps nor dies; the passages only respect the body; it is that only which at death is gathered to the fathers, and buried in the graves of ancestors; and which sleeps in the dust, or is buried in the dust of the earth; the sleep of which stands opposed to the change that will pass on the bodies of living saints at the coming of Christ. 2b1d.

Sleep is only of the body,[5] and, according to the philosopher is a passion that belongs to the sensitive part, a kind of a band and immoveableness of it, so that it cannot operate; and says it only belongs to animals that have a brain, or something analogous to it;[6] it is defined "a cessation of the external senses from operation, the vapours filling the nerves and the sensory passages, and so hinder the influx of the animal spirits." [7] But what is all this to the soul, an immaterial and incorporeal substance, which has no brain, nor nerves, nor sensory passages, nor animal spirits? and therefore sleep has no place in it, and cannot be predicated of it. 2b1e.

When the body is asleep the soul is awake and active, as appears in abundance of instances, in dreams and visions of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men, and is capable of attending to what is suggested to it, and of receiving instruction; (see Job 4:12-17; 33:15, 16), it understands and perceives, devises and contrives, reasons and discourses, chooses and refuses, grieves and rejoices, hopes and fears, loves and hates, and the like; it can take in hints, admonitions, advice, and directions from God, or angels sent by him; as in some not good men, as Abimelech, Laban, Balaam, &c. and others truly good men, as Jacob, Daniel, Joseph, &c. whose souls, when their bodies were asleep, were capable of attending to them, and receiving them, and acted according to them. 2b2.

The advocates for the insensibility and inactivity of the soul after death, urge such scriptures which represent the happiness of the saints, and the misery of the wicked, as not taking place until the last day, the end of the world, the resurrection of the dead, and the day of judgment, when the wicked shall go into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal (Luke 14:14; 1 Thess. 4:16, 18; 2 Tim. 4:8; Col. 3:3, 4; Matthew 11:22, 24; 13:40, 41, 47, 50; 25:46; Rev. 20:12, 15), to which may be replied, that though they are represented as then happy or miserable, it is no where said that they are not happy nor miserable before that time; nor that they are insensible of any happiness or misery, but the contrary.

Besides there is a twofold state of the righteous and the wicked after death, respecting their happiness and their misery; the one is just begun at death; the other is full, consummate, and perfect, at the resurrection and judgment; now it is of the latter these scriptures speak, and not of the former; and it is allowed, the righteous will not be in the full possession of happiness until the last day, when their bodies will be raised and united to their souls, and both together enter into the full joy of their Lord; nor will the wicked receive the full measure of their punishment until the resurrection and the judgment are over, when both soul and body shall be cast into hell; just as it is with the devils, they are not yet in full torment, though

cast down to hell, and are reserved to the judgment of the great day; but then they are not in a state of insensibility, they feel distress and anguish now, and tremble at their future doom; so the wicked, they are not insensible of their misery now, and of what they are to endure: and both righteous and wicked upon death enter immediately into a state of happiness or misery; the righteous are happy from the time of their death, and as soon as absent from the body are present with the Lord; and the wicked are no sooner dead, but in hell they lift up their eyes; though neither the one is in complete happiness, nor the other in full misery, yet both sensible of their present case, and what they shall be in hereafter. 2b3.

They improve all such places to their advantage, which speak of those in the grave, and in the state of the dead, as incapable of praising God (Ps. 30:9; 88:10, 11; 115:17, 18; Isa. 38:18), to which it may be answered, 2b3a. Not to observe that Calvin[8] interprets the passages of the damned in hell under the wrath of God, and a sense of it. These scriptures speak only of the body, which is dust originally, and returns to the dust at death, and is buried in the dust, and while in such a state cannot praise God; "Shall the dust praise thee?" it is the body which only dies, and goes down to the pit, and is laid in the grave, and which, while there, cannot be employed in praising God, "Shall the dead arise and praise thee?" &c. but then this hinders not but that their souls may and do praise God, in the manner as angels do, with whom they are sometimes joined in the Book of the Revelation; and are represented as with them, glorifying God, praising his name, singing hallelujahs, ascribing "salvation to him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever" (Rev. 7:9-12). 2b3b.

These passages only respect praising God before men, and in the church militant, as is done by saints now in the land of the living; but then notwithstanding, the souls of departed saints may and do praise the Lord in the church triumphant, and with the hundred and forty four thousand in mount Zion, and before an innumerable company of angels and spirits of just men made perfect, to whom they are come; and therefore such passages are no proof of the insensibility and inactivity of separate souls. 2b4.

They argue from souls being deprived of thought and memory at death, that therefore they must be in a state of insensibility. As for thought, that passage is urged in Psalm 146:4. "In that very day," that is, in which man returns to his earth, or dies, his thoughts perish; but these, as has been observed, do not design thoughts in general, but purposes, schemes, and plans, the effect of thought, which come to nothing at death, and are never carried into execution; and though the thoughts, particularly of good men, are not employed about the same things as when on earth, about worldly things, yet they are employed about spiritual and heavenly ones; and can, with pleasure and gratitude, remember the great and good things God did for them in life; yea, even the memories of wicked men are pointed to after death; "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things," &c. (Luke 16:25).

And that worm that dies not, is no other than consciousness of guilt contracted, and the memory of past sins committed in life, which torture the separate soul after death (Mark 9:44). Should it be urged, that a person, when asleep, is destitute of thought, especially when in a deep sleep; who, upon awaking, cannot remember anything he has thought of: this doth not carry in it sufficient conviction, that the mind is then destitute of thought; for how often is it that a man, when awake, cannot remember what he thought of the last minute? it is owned, that in dreams the soul thinks, but then the man is asleep, and shows that sleep and thought are not incompatible: besides, when deep sleep falls upon man, the soul is capable of attending to what is suggested to it, and receiving instruction thereby; as some passages in Job, before mentioned, show.

And after all, it should be proved, that the soul is asleep when the body is; and particularly, when separate from it, ere any argument from hence can be brought to prove the soul is deprived of thought by it; and is in a state of insensibility. 2b5. It is observed, that it is said of the "dead," that they "know not anything" (Eccl. 9:5). But this is to be understood of the things of this world; they do not know the affairs of it, what is done or doing in it, no, not the condition and circumstances of their own families they have left behind; they do not know whether their sons come to honour or to disgrace; whether they are in prosperous or in adverse circumstances (Job 14:21).

But then they know the things of the other world, in which they are; they know God, and Christ, and the holy angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect, and the happiness of these and of themselves; they know even as they are known: yea, wicked men know and feel the lashes of an accusing, torturing conscience, the pains of hell, and the wrath of God, the fire that is not quenched; and so are not in a state of insensibility. I go on, 3. Thirdly, to point out the work and employment of separate souls, especially of good men, after the death of the body, until the resurrection of it: and here I shall not give a scope to fancy and conjecture, which may lead persons to say many things doubtful and uncertain; and since the scriptures are sparing in the account they give of this matter, I shall content myself with just observing some few things which may be gathered from thence; and which may suggest unto us the work they are employed in; for it cannot be thought that they are idle and unemployed in the happy state in which they are.

And 3a. First, it need not be doubted, but that they are employed in celebrating and adoring the perfections of God; since this is the work of their kindred spirits, the angels, with whom they are now associated; they are constantly employed, in ascribing glory to God (Rev. 7:11, 12; 5:11, 12), so holy souls adore the perfections of God's holiness, to which they bear some resemblance, and are thankful at the remembrance of it; and the almighty power of God, of which they have had experience in this life, and in bringing them to the happy state they are now in; and the wisdom of God, displayed in the works of nature, providence, and grace, of which they have now a clearer understanding; and the grace, mercy, and love of God, which appear in every branch of their salvation; and the faithfulness of God to his counsels, covenant, and promises; to dwell on these subjects will be no inconsiderable part of their employment. 3b.

Secondly, they are also employed in beholding God in Christ, and the glory of Christ; being pure in heart, and perfect in holiness, they see God with the eyes of their understanding; behold him for themselves, and not another, as their covenant God and Father in Christ; and his glory as displayed in the Person of Christ; and have as much knowledge of him as creatures are capable of; and solace and delight themselves in the views of him, and in communion with him: and though they see not Christ with the eyes of their bodies, as they will after the resurrection; yet with the eyes of their minds they gaze upon and wonder at those glories and excellencies they see in him; and this is the end of Christ's intercession for them, that they be with him where he is, and behold his glory (John 17:24).

Thirdly, they are likewise employed in the exercise of various graces: if it is commonly said of faith, hope, and love, that they are travelling graces, which accompany saints in this life; but cease, as to their exercise, at death, especially the two former; the latter is indeed allowed to continue after death: but faith is usually said to be changed for sight, and hope for fruition; which, in some respects, and in part, is true; yet I see not why faith and hope may not be thought to have their use, and to be in exercise after death, and especially in the separate state, until the resurrection: it can scarcely be doubted, that separate souls firmly "believe" the resurrection of their bodies, that they will be raised again, and reunited to their souls; and as that will add to their happiness, it cannot but be desired by them; and as it is what is at present

unseen, unenjoyed, and is future, it must be the object of hope, about which that grace must be conversant, until it is brought to pass; and thus as Christ "rested in hope of the resurrection of his body" (Ps. 16:9), so the souls of saints in heaven rest in hope of the resurrection of theirs; and may be truly said to "wait for the redemption of the body".

Some think Job has respect to this, when he says, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come;" meaning, not his change by death, though that is a truth, but his change at the resurrection, when Christ will change the vile bodies of his people, and fashion them like to his glorious one. Yea, "patience," rest, and quietness, are to be, and are exercised by souls in their separate state: to the souls under the altar it is said, "that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also, and their brethren that should be killed, as they were, should be fulfilled;" that is, be easy, quiet, and patient, till that time, comes, and this is done (Rev. 6:11).

And as for love, there is no doubt but it will be in its highest act and exercise. 3d. Fourthly, they are also employed in serving God; so those come out of great tribulation are said to be "before the throne of God, and to serve him day and night in his temple" (Rev. 7:14, 15), not by preaching, and hearing, and attending on the word and ordinances; yet there are duties which are performed in this state; if not prayer, yet most certainly praise, in the highest perfection: I see not why prayer may not be allowed to the church triumphant and its members, though not for themselves, yet for the church militant and its members, that they may be delivered from their present evils; and that the justice of God might be glorified in taking vengeance on their enemies; and that they may shortly join their general assembly; something like this is ascribed to the souls under the altar, who are represented as expostulating with God after this manner, "And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev. 6:10) and, indeed, what is the earnest wish and desire of separate souls, after the resurrection of their bodies and their reunion to them, but prayer, that so it might be? however, praise is their grand employment, their principal business, in which they are continually engaged; these ransomed ones come to Zion with songs, and there they sing them; the songs of electing, redeeming, calling, and persevering grace, ascribing glory to the Father, that has chose them in Christ; and to the Son, who has redeemed them to God by his blood; and to the Spirit, who has regenerated, sanctified, and called them; and to all Three, for the preservation of them to the kingdom and glory of God. 3e.

Fifthly, much of the employment of souls in this separate state lies in converse with angels and the spirits of just men made perfect. Angels have some way or other of conversing with each other; we read of the "tongue of angels;" not that they speak any particular language, and with an articulate voice; but they have speech among themselves, which they understand; they can communicate their thoughts to one another, and be happy in their mutual converse; (see Daniel 8:13; 12:5-7), and angels can convey their sense to the spirits of men; and the spirits of men can communicate theirs to them; such an intercourse between angels and the souls of men has been carried on in dreams and visions, even in this imperfect state; and much more are they capable of conversing together in a more perfect one.

The souls of men in the separate state are distinguishable from one another; and there are ways and means, no doubt, of knowing one from another; thus the soul of Abraham may be known from the soul of Isaac; and the soul of Isaac from the soul of Abraham; and the soul of Jacob from both: and as the saints will know one another in heaven,[9] one part of their happiness will lie in conversing together about divine and heavenly things; and, indeed, about what they have had experience of, both in providence and grace, while they dwelt in their bodies on earth. ENDNOTES:

[1] Socin. Epist. 5. ad Volkelium inter opera ejus, tom. 1. p. 454.

[2] Vid. Peltii. Harmon. Remonstrant. & Socin. art. 22. paragraph. 2. p. 258.

[3] Calvin, "Assertio non dormire sed vivere," &c. fol. 51.

[4] "Isti non solum opus Dei ad tempus intermittunt, sed etiam extinguunt," Calvin. "Assertio non dormire sed vivere," &c. fol. 18. 2.

[5] Anaxagoras & Leucippus apud Plutarch. de Placitis Philosoph. 1. 5. c. 25.

[6] Aristot. de Somno, c. 1. et c. 7. et de part. animal. 1. 2. c. 7.

[7] Conimbricenses apud Burgersdicii Philosoph. Natural. disp. 22. s. 13. vide Suidam in voce upgoV

[8] Assertio, &c. ut supra, fol. 44, &c.

[9] See a sermon of mine, called, "The glorious State of the Saints in Heaven," p. 34, 35.

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