

The Intermediate State

- This is also part of individual eschatology.
- Definition: the state or condition of people between their physical death and the return of Jesus Christ (with the resurrection of the body).
- There is need for practical answers to the inevitable questions from loved ones about the person who has died.
 - People often want to know where their dead loved ones are right now, and if they are conscious of what we do down here.
 - It is difficult to answer due to a relative scarcity of passages that describe the intermediate state.
 - We know there is one, and it is of disembodiment. But we don't know the answers to the other questions.
- Also we are seeing the denial of the biblical position of humanity—psychosomatic. Now people are saying through the influence of neuro-science that a person is nothing more than their body. They then claim no one is in heaven. This is a denial of the intermediate state.



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- Inadequate views of the intermediate state.
- Soul Sleep –This is the idea that the soul reposes in a state of unconsciousness.
 - Historically, some 16th century Anabaptists believed this. So did Socinians (who were heretical).
 - Today, 7th Day Adventists and Jehovah Witnesses.
- There is alleged support for soul sleep.
 - First, Scripture refers to death as sleep.
 - Second some Old Testament passages indicate the dead don't have conscious existence. They are unable to praise God and thank Him.
 - Third, if some people live in the presence of Jesus Christ with blessings of joy, comfort, and rewards in the intermediate state, what need is there for Christ's return and the resurrection? Since there is a resurrection, that must mean there is no intermediate state.
 - Fourth, they hold to a monistic anthropology. People are only bodies rather than a complex person, body and soul. So when the body ceases to function, the person cannot exist.

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- Soul Continued.
 - There are problems. The biblical references to sleep are euphemisms. Jesus makes that clear with Lazarus.
 - Also, there are biblical references to a personal consciousness of people between death and resurrection. The parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 16:19-31) is a great example.
 - The thief of the cross was promised that “Today” he would be in paradise.
 - In Hebrews 12:23 shows worship in heaven with disembodied spirits who have been made perfect.
 - Finally, monistic anthropology contradicts scripture and has many philosophical problems.
- I think it is fair to present a quick biblical overview of this.
 - The Old Testament saints did not have as complete of an understanding of the intermediate state as people of the New Testament.
 - Yet, even in their primitive understanding of this doctrine, they still understood there was an intermediate state. For example, when you go back to the patriarchs, Genesis says that when they died, they were gathered to their people.
 - This cannot refer to being buried with relatives, since Abraham and Sarah were buried in Canaan when their families would have been buried in Babylon.

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- Consider these passages:
 - Gen 25:8 He took his last breath and died at a ripe old age, old and contented, and he was gathered to his people.
 - Gen 25:17 This is the length of Ishmael's life: 137 years. He took his last breath and died, and was gathered to his people.
 - Gen 35:29 He took his last breath and died, and was gathered to his people, old and full of days. His sons Esau and Jacob buried him.
 - Gen 49:33 When Jacob had finished instructing his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and died. He was gathered to his people.
- The Old Testament also expands the concept with Sheol, which often is translated as the pit or grave. It is the general word that refers to the grave itself. As such it has numerous meanings.
 - In some usages it refers to the literal grave and just refers to someone being dead.
 - Other times it refers to a place where the dead reside. Psalm 139:8 is of David saying no matter where he goes, God is there too. He says this to show that it is impossible to flee from God's omnipresence.
 - Jesus expands our understanding of Sheol in Luke 16:19-31
- A very compelling passage is 1 Samuel 28:11-15.

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- The idea of the intermediate state was well established in the mind of Christians until 19th century liberalism crept up.
- Liberalism rejected the idea of the resurrection body, but instead adopted the old Greek notion of the immortality of soul.
 - Thus, eternal life is in the form of the soul and begins after physical death.
- Neo-Orthodoxy challenged this, but went to another extreme. They claimed that the immortality of the soul was a pagan Greek idea, and was foreign to Hebraic thought.
 - To them, humans are only comprised of the body, which is synonymous with the soul.
 - When a person dies, they simply cease to exist. Therefore, the only hope of the future is the expectation of the resurrection body.



The Intermediate State

- The Roman Catholic Church has its own view of intermediate state—Purgatory.
 - Definition: “a state of temporary punishment for those who, departing this life in the grace of God, are not entirely free from venial sins or have not yet fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions” (Joseph Pole, *Eschatology; or The Catholic Doctrine of the Last Things*, 77).
- The doctrine of purgatory summarized.
 - There are a few smaller compartments of purgatory that only house certain people. For example, Limbus Partum is for the Old Testament saints, and Limbus Infantium is for the dead unbaptized infants. Due to the Roman Catholic view of original sin, unbaptized babies cannot go to heaven, but they go to some type of limbo that is neither the glory of heaven or fury of hell. The Old Testament saints also are not worthy of heaven because of that taint of Adam upon them, but they are not wicked enough for Hell since they obeyed God in the Old Testament.
 - For everyone else, purgatory is a place of purgation where you have to work off all sins not atoned for at the time of your death.

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- Conceptions have changed over time.
 - For example, in the time of Aquinas, it was speculated that purgatory was a vestibule of Hell.
 - More modern Catholic theologians say it is instead attached to heaven.
 - Some Catholics with more universalistic tendencies say purgatory is for all or most men to work off their sin, whereas more traditional people believe that only Catholics get to work off sin in purgatory.
- Catholics also make a distinction between venial sins and mortal sins.
 - Purgatory traditionally is only meant to purge venial sins. If a person, even a Catholic, dies in mortal sin then Hell is automatic.
 - The venial sins are said to be purged through three ways – pardon, contrition, or suffering.
 - It is in purgatory that Catholics believe God carries out the final cleansing thus making them worthy to enter God's presence.



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- To make sense of this, you need to understand something about Catholic Eschatology.
- Those who die in mortal sin goes to hell immediately. There is no hope.
- For those who die in a state of grace fully pure, their soul goes into fully heaven (Mary and the Saints, cooperated with grace and fully obeyed God).
- Those who die with the stain of forgiven mortal sins and venial sins (they are less grave), their soul goes to purgatory.
 - They failed to reach full purity. So the lack of purity must be purged in purgatory. The soul in purgatory is unable to perform works to satisfy God's justice, so they must passively suffer.
 - The penance of purgatory is the same as the torments of hell, but the difference is purgatory is temporary, and hell is eternal.
 - The souls in purgatory can be aided by we who still live on earth. We can pay money so Masses on earth can be said on their behalf. We can pray for a person's release from purgatory. We can engage in good works which can be placed into the church's treasury of merits so they can be released. We can also purchase indulgences.

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- How does the RCC justify this complex and detailed belief?
- 2 Maccabees 12:38-46.
 - Judas rallied his army and went to the city of Adullam. As the week was ending, they purified themselves according to custom and kept the sabbath there. On the following day, since the task had now become urgent, Judas and his men went to gather up the bodies of the slain (sc. soldiers) and bury them with their kinsmen in their ancestral tombs. But under the tunic of each of the dead they found amulets sacred to the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. So it was clear to all that this was why these men had been slain. They all therefore praised the ways of the Lord, the just judge who brings to light the things that are hidden. Turning to supplication, they prayed that the sinful deed might be fully blotted out. The noble Judas warned the soldiers to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened because of the sin of those who had fallen. He then took up a collection among all his soldiers, amounting to two thousand silver drachmas, which he sent to Jerusalem to provide for an *expiatory sacrifice*. In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way, inasmuch as he had the resurrection of the dead in view; for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to *pray for them in death*. But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Thus *he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin*.

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- Clearly, purgatory is grounded on a text that Protestants see as non-canonical.
 - The early church did not recognize it as canonical. The Reformers rejected it. The RCC followed Augustine in thinking it was inspired.
- But the Catholic church does appeal to passages that we believe are canonical.
- 1 Cor 3:15.
 - This talks about our works being assessed by fire. Catholics say it is a person who is suffering the fires of purgatory.
 - But that is not what Paul is talking about. He is talking about our works being tested by fire, not our souls being purged by fire.
- Matthew 12:32.
 - This is where Jesus is talking about sin against the Holy Spirit, and says it will not be forgiven in this life or the one to come. This then opens up the possibility that there are other sins that will be forgiven in the life to come.
 - Since that seems incompatible with heaven, they say it implies purgatory. There is an error in logic here. To say something will not happen in the age to come does not imply that something will actually happen in the present age.

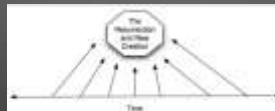


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- Purgatory has problems.
- First, it is based on synergistic salvation.
 - Christ has accomplished the role the Father appointed for Him, but the Catholics say we have to do our part with God by cooperating with Him.
 - We as evangelicals disagree with synergistic salvation. There is no role we play in order to achieve our salvation.
 - Their synergism is way different than the Arminian kind. It actually is works-based.
- Second, the strongest ground for purgatory is a non-canonical book.
- Third, the teaching of purgatory is contradicted by Scripture on the assurance of salvation.
 - Scripture affirms genuine believers that repent and trust in Christ are assured of salvation. Catholic theology denounces and denies such assurance.
- Fourth, historically, the belief in purgatory has led to nauseating abuses. The selling of indulgences was based on the belief in purgatory. Poor people were giving all they owned to get their relatives' souls out of purgatory.

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- The final theory to reject is more of a newer one. It is the idea that the resurrection occurs immediately after death.
 - It is argued that when you die as a Christian, you are given the resurrection body and live in heaven, and if you are an unbeliever you are given the immortal body to burn in Hell.
- This view disputes the teachings in 1 Corinthians 15 that contradict it by saying Paul still had the incorrect teaching he received as a Pharisee, and thus favored a future bodily resurrection.
 - But later on when he wrote 2 Corinthians 5, he had the correct view by stating being away from the body was cloth us in the presence of the Lord.
- Apparently this view misses the point of the phrase, “away from the body.”
- Furthermore, this view denies the doctrine of inerrancy.
 - Why would the Holy Spirit leave a huge chapter on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 that would be theologically incorrect?
 - Also, Philippians 3 was written after both Corinthian letters and it speaks of us having a physical body like Jesus' when He returns

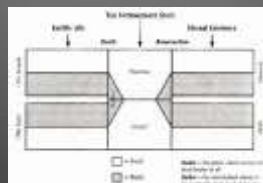


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- We can conclude this section by now stating what the Bible actually teaches about the intermediate state.
- Believers (disembodied) go immediately into the presence of the Lord.
 - 2 Cor 5:8 – In fact, we are confident, and we would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.
 - Phil 1:23-24 – I am torn between the two. I long to depart and be with Christ—which is far better—²⁴ but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.
 - Luke 23:43 – And he said to him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”
 - Heb 12:23 – to the assembly of the firstborn whose names have been written in heaven, to a Judge, who is God of all, to the spirits of righteous people made perfect.
- Unbelievers (disembodied) go immediately into misery, torment, and punishment.
 - Luke 16:23-26 = rich man’s misery and torment.
- Believers await the resurrection of their bodies.
 - At the return of Christ, we will be reunited with our bodies. 1 Cor 15 is all about this.

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- There is no “second opportunity” to accept Christ post-mortem, in the intermediate state.
- There is a small movement, but still growing (even among evangelicals) that because of the wideness of God’s mercy, He will give human beings another chance or opportunity to hear the gospel, trust, and obey Christ.
 - For some, this will be their first opportunity since they never heard of the gospel.
 - For others, this will be the last of many opportunities.
 - The majority will repent and be saved. They already began to experience separation and alienation from the Lord in Hell.



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- There are numerous problems with this.
 - First, the theological support (appeal to God's great mercy alone) neglects consideration of His other attributes (justice, holiness, righteousness, wrath, etc.) It is an elevation of one attribute over another, which distorts God and His ways.
 - Second, biblical support is lacking. There is no mention anywhere of a second opportunity. In fact, it is contradicted.
 - Third Scripture presents a coming judgment as determined by things we do in this life, not by some sort of post-mortem chance in the intermediate state (Hebrews 9:27). Man dies once, then comes the judgment.



Conclusion

- Individual eschatology is often neglected today, but it is important nevertheless.
- Included in this topic are the following sub-topics:
 - Physical Death
 - The Art of Dying
 - Intermediate State
- Like the other doctrines of the Bible, this should spur us on to holy living in the present.