
FAQ

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Afterlife, negates need for the resurrection

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Going to Heaven makes no sense in light of the doctrine of resurrection. What is the point of the future resurrection if Believers just go to Heaven when they die?

One of the most frequent arguments against a conscious, intermediate afterlife in Heaven, is that going to be with the Lord is thought to negate the significance of the resurrection, making it a bit anticlimactic. It is very true that many of today's Believers think that salvation is to be understood exclusively in terms of "going to Heaven when you die," and the future resurrection of the body, the Millennial Kingdom, and a restored Kingdom of God on Earth are distant afterthoughts. But how much of this is due to much of today's popular preaching, and not a careful and reasonable reading of Scripture? Admittedly, most people are more concerned about the place they will *immediately* go after they die, which most rightly consider to be the realm of another dimension, than they are about the long term plan of salvation history. Unfortunately, the whole picture of what comes *after* the intermediate state has not been told to enough of today's Believers.

Is going to Heaven immediately after death akin to "canceling" the significance of the resurrection? Perhaps this is best answered with another question: *What do we consider the resurrection to be?* Do we consider it to be re-creation from personal extinction—or the recapitulation of a deceased human person: with the consciousness placed back into a reanimated body?

One of the most serious problems regarding the concept of psychopannychy or "soul sleep" is what happens to human memory, which is chemically stored in the brain. In holding to a monistic anthropology of the human person effectively being a body, then when a deceased body decomposes, so does a person's memory. What happens at the resurrection? *Where has the memory gone?* Psychopannychists could argue that human memory is stored in the mind of God, but then that would require them to at least accept a quasi-dualism—where the "self" or "personality" part of a deceased person has to be stored outside of the body for a time.

From a monistic perspective, the human being is entirely physical, quantitatively the same as an animal like a dog or cat. If a deceased person has completely decomposed into base atoms, has to be re-created, and then outside memories are implanted—then philosophically there is enough doubt for us to wonder whether or not the one who is to be "resurrected" is the same person who lived a life on Earth before. Such atoms could, after all, have become part of someone else after decomposition has had its way and someone's remains end up in the food and water supply. Boyd and Eddy as monists have to at least acknowledge,

"Some have argued that if the self does not exist between death and resurrection, then the Lord literally re-creates us on the resurrection day. This is problematic, they argue, for it is tantamount to claiming that God creates different people who replicate us in a previous life."¹

All that they can appeal to though, as monists, is some level of mystery on how God might preserve the memories and thoughts of a person who has died. Those who believe in a conscious intermediate state do not have to appeal to any degree

¹ "The Human Constitution Debate," in Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), pp 98-99.

of mystery to know how a person remains the same in the time between death and resurrection. The anticipation of the dying Stephen, who had seen Heaven opened up, was clearly “Lord Yeshua, receive my spirit!” (Acts 7:59, NASU). We might not be told all of the things that go on during the intermediate state, but an intermediate afterlife in either Heaven or Hell, before final rewards and punishment, undoubtedly assures us that the person who once lived an Earthly life is the same authentic one who is to be resurrected—and not a copy or clone. Holistic dualism emphasizes that ideally a person is a fully embodied being, but recognizes the *temporary* separation of the consciousness between death and resurrection.

If we ever think that as Believers looking forward to seeing our Lord in Heaven at time of death, makes the resurrection a bit of an add-on or appendage, then we really do need to think about what we are told goes on in Heaven. Revelation 6:10, for example, includes the martyrs in Heaven entreating the Divine throne: “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (NASU). These deceased holy ones or saints, conscious and undoubtedly having seen the Savior, **are very much eager to see salvation history progress forward**. They are eager for Yeshua to defeat His enemies, to be resurrected, and to be reunited with their loved ones who are still living on Earth. This will only take place at the Second Coming of the Messiah.

In the estimation of Bruce Milne, “we [must] carefully maintain the clear New Testament focus on the parousia [or, coming] of Christ as the true goal and crowning expression of the Christian’s victory over death....For [these saints] the focus is on the coming of the Son of Man.”² So, as exciting as going to Heaven might be, those in Heaven know that more is to come! They know that it is only at the resurrection when all the holy ones, both deceased and living, can be a unified company (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

² Bruce Milne, *The Message of Heaven & Hell* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 168.