

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO THE DOCTRINE SOUL SLEEP AND THE BURN UP DOCTRINE (ANNIHILATION)

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I have put these two separate doctrines together because they go hand in hand. It seems that when a person believes one they also tend to believe the other as well. Who holds to these beliefs? They are mainly taught by Jehovah's Witness and Mormons both of which are declared as Cults or false religions. These views are also held by Seventh Day Adventist, which has had a very shaky start believing many false beliefs but in recent years have made great efforts to correct some of their doctrines. Arnold Murray who is a Bible teacher out of Arkansas holds to these beliefs as well. Many mainstream scholars consider Murray a false teacher because of the beliefs he holds to. This belief has been held by different groups throughout the years such as the Anabaptist

What is Soul Sleep? Soul Sleep is the belief that when a person dies then their body is buried but their soul becomes unconscious at that point or sleeps until the resurrection, leaving the person unaware of anything taking place around them or the passing of time. Those who hold to this belief reference the word sleep used many times in connection with death and being awakened from the dust as meaning the soul has been brought to consciousness from the grave.

What Biblical support do they use? The verses are Job 14:10, 14; Psalm 6:5, 49:15; Daniel 12:2; John 3:13, 5:28-29; Acts 2:29-34; 2 Peter 3:4 and Ecclesiastes 9:5, 12:7. Instead of doing a thorough study of each of these verses I would rather look at verses that have not been dealt with in a satisfactory matter to me that teach us that there is more to it than just sleeping through time waiting for Jesus to return.

Genesis 35:18 speaks of the death of Rachel in giving birth to her last child, Benjamin. This verse tells us that her soul departed. Why? It departed because when the body dies then the soul and spirit continue on.

Luke 23:43 speaks of Jesus hanging on the cross between two thieves. One seems to repent and turn to Jesus to be saved. He cries out for Jesus to remember him and Jesus tells him that today this man would be with Jesus in Paradise. He did not say I will come for you at some point but today referring to that very day that the thief and Jesus died.

Revelation 6:9-11 says that the 5th seal has been broken giving the time frame for what is happening. Neither the judgment nor the resurrection has taken place. In this account we find under the altar the souls of those who have been martyred while living on the earth during the tribulation. Notice that they are not a sleep and they are aware of what has happened and can even talk.

Luke 16:19-31 which is the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Soul Sleep proponents want to force this in as a parable. For the sake of argument let us say that it is a parable (the author believes it to be real events described by Jesus). In the parable you still have two people that are dead and the description given is not of people who are asleep but alert, knowing things that have happened and talking which is very similar to the Revelation 6:9 passages.

1 Peter 3:18-20 speaks of the events that took place after Jesus died. Notice he did not go to sleep and wait for the Father to resurrect Him but He went to the spirits, which can be argued to be

demons only or demons and dead people. The main point is if Jesus did not fall into soul sleep why should we expect to.

1 Thessalonians 5:9-11 which gives us a great promise. 1. We are not destined to undergo wrath. 2. Whether we are awake or asleep that is whether we are alive or dead verse 10 promises that we will live together with Christ. It did not say we would sleep or be in a separate place than Christ. It goes on to tell us to encourage each other with these things.

2 Corinthians 5:6-8 tends to teach the same promise as above that when a person leaves the body they are in the presence of the Lord. Those who hold to soul sleep would have us not only ignore verse 7 but to do the opposite and that is to walk by sight rather than by faith.

What is the burn up doctrine or as some call it annihilation? It is the belief that the wicked after death, resurrection and judgment will be completely destroyed, burned up or annihilated never to be remembered again.

Those who hold to the burn up doctrine tend to hold to soul sleep is because if the wicked after judgment are burned up then what happens to them in the intermediate state or after death. If the wicked are not asleep awaiting the resurrection to be judged and done away with then what are they doing? If they are wicked then they cannot be enjoying life with God. If soul sleep is the wrong doctrine then the wicked dead must be undergoing some type of punishment now.

Since the burn up doctrine does not believe in eternal punishment or hell then there are a few verses that they will have to accurately deal with to hold to their position.

Matthew 23:33 Jesus was talking to the Pharisees and He asked them how they would escape the sentence of hell? Well if hell is another word for the grave that would not make sense because everyone will be brought out of the grave at resurrection, so that is not a sentence. Hell here is the Greek word Geena which means a place of future punishment.

Matthew 10:28 the same Greek word is given for hell which gives the idea that God has the power and ability to sentence someone to punishment in this place called hell.

Mark 9:43-48 once again is the same Greek word. Is this verse teaching us to cut off our hand, foot or pluck out an eye so that we can prevent going to the grave as the burn up doctrine wants us to believe, when they believe that everyone will go to the grave. Of course we are being warned to not end up having to suffer eternal punishment. Notice 4 times these verses mention unquenchable fire.

Matthew 25:31-46 this is the separation of the sheep (believers) and the goats (unbelievers). Notice that the goats in verse 41 have to depart, are accursed and are cast into the eternal fire and it says that is the place prepared for the devil and demons. Also verse 46 gives two routes for people. 1. The goats or the wicked go to eternal punishment. 2. The sheep or the believers go to eternal life. By the way the Greek word for eternal is the same in both cases.

Matthew 13:41-42 tells us that in this place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. If it is just a burning up of people in this fiery place then it would not seem likely there would be much weeping and gnashing off those being burned unless it is referring to eternal punishment or let me say forever and ever.

2 Thessalonians 1:9 tells us that there is a penalty for not obeying the Gospel and it says it is eternal destruction. Once again this is the same Greek word used in Matthew 25: 46 to refer to eternal life. If it is only temporary then that would also mean that our eternal life is only temporary.

Revelation 20:10 notice that the devil is cast into the lake of fire, where the false prophet and beast already are but then it says they will be tormented night and day forever and ever. Does not sound like a burning up to me.

Revelation 20:14-15 tells us that at the judgment some things will happen. Death and Hades (Greek word meaning the realm of the dead) were cast into the lake of fire that Revelation 20:10 tells where the devil is. If the devil will be tormented day and night forever and ever then it would make sense that everything placed there would also. Notice verse 15 if your name is not found in the book of life (you are not saved) then you too are cast into the lake of fire to be not burned up but tormented day and night forever and ever.

Is this a new wave of false beliefs? No this belief has been around for many years and Theologians have addressed it in many different decades. Here are a few quotes from voices in the past.

Justin Martyr 150 AD "We have been taught that only they may aim at immortality who have lived a holy and virtuous life near to God. We believe that they who live wickedly and do not repent will be punished in everlasting fire" (*First Apology, 21*).

Second Clement 150 AD "If we do the will of Christ, we shall obtain rest; but if not, if we neglect his commandments, nothing will rescue us from eternal punishment" (*Second Clement 5:5*).

Athenagoras 177 AD "[W]e [Christians] are persuaded that when we are removed from this present life we shall live another life, better than the present one ... Then we shall abide near God and with God, changeless and free from suffering in the soul ... or if we fall with the rest [of mankind], a worse one and in fire; for God has not made us as sheep or beasts of burden, a mere incidental work, that we should perish and be annihilated" (*Plea for the Christians 31*).

Hippolytus 212 AD "Standing before [Christ's] judgment, all of them, men, angels, and demons, crying out in one voice, shall say: 'Just if your judgment!' And the righteousness of that cry will be apparent in the recompense made to each. To those who have done well, everlasting enjoyment shall be given; while to the lovers of evil shall be given eternal punishment. The unquenchable and unending fire awaits these latter, and a certain fiery worm which does not die and which does not waste the body but continually bursts forth from the body with unceasing pain. No sleep will give them rest; no night will soothe them; no death will deliver them from punishment; no appeal of interceding friends will profit them" (*Against the Greeks 3*).

The Bible has to be our basis for belief and if it teaches the opposite of soul sleep and the burn up doctrine then the verses that these people point to must have explanations because the Bible does not contradict itself.

Let me conclude by saying after further study of the soul sleep doctrine and the burn up doctrine I find them to be false teachings and not in line with Christian beliefs that are outlined by the Bible.