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To Be Absent from the Body Is to Be Present with Jesus!

Reflections [Covenant and Doctrine](#) 13 November 2015

[2 Corinthians 5:6-8](#)

[Luke 23:43](#)

[Hosea 13:14](#)

This is not my own statement, though I firmly believe in its truth. Paul wrote, in 2 Corinthians 5:8, "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." Little effort is needed to interpret "absent from the body" as the effect of death. Death is inevitable, and when it occurs, the inner being, or soul, of the departed leaves its temporary abode, the body. The difficulty arises when we try to answer the question of when the soul comes into the glorious presence of Jesus. Although thousands of instances of near-death experience have been reported, in truth, no one, except for Jesus Christ, has ever returned from biological death to tell us what happens afterwards. I would rather leave the matter as one of the mysteries of the Kingdom of Jesus. There are, however, several pointers to it found in the Holy Bible. Before I proceed, I want to caution the reader that what follows is strictly my own personal thinking.

It is necessary to touch briefly upon the various world views of existence after death, to put matters in perspective. Atheists believe that at death one ceases to exist; there is no afterlife or eternal soul that continues into eternity. Some religions, including Hinduism, hold a pantheistic world view, and teach that one goes through an endless cycle of reincarnation until the cycle is broken and the person becomes one with the divine. Others believe that after death the human soul remains on the earth, or travels to join the departed spirits of the ancestors in an unknown world, believed by some to be a realm of shadows. Islam teaches that at the end of time, God will judge the works of all men, and that those whose good works outweigh their wrongdoing are received into Paradise, while others are consigned to Hell. Most world views of this kind rest upon supposition, and are not supported by hard evidence.

Christianity, however, is quite different: our eternal existence is demonstrated by Jesus Christ through His Resurrection and His appearances to many people. It would not be wrong to say that while the leaders of every other religion lie dead in their graves, Christians have a living God, Who has conquered death. Having said that, I must caution the reader that there are many divergent interpretations within the Bible concerning the afterlife.

I believe that as soon as we cross over, through the gateway of death, our inner self, or soul, will come into the glorious presence of Jesus Christ for eternity. The body, the temporal abode of the soul, will be left behind, and will decay, dust to dust, ashes to ashes. Jesus Himself, a few moments before His own death upon the Cross, confirmed this for us. He told one of the malefactors crucified beside Him, "Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). In the New International Version, the same verse is rendered, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." Two important points may be noted in this statement. First, Jesus is declaring a truth, and as such His statement cannot be subjected to any form of reinterpretation. Second, He is affirming that he would be with Him in Paradise that very day. Paul reinforces this belief, that our souls come into the presence of Jesus Christ immediately after death, in the same passage quoted above (2 Corinthians 5:6-8). Either the soul is in the body and away from the Lord, or it is away from the body and with the Lord; it cannot be anywhere in between. There is, it appears, no indication of any interval between the moment of death and the soul's coming into the presence of Jesus, in what Paul believed.

We must also consider the second coming of Jesus Christ, and the Day of Judgement. This may, on a cursory reading, suggest that at death the souls go to a temporary holding place, Hades, to await their final resurrection, judgement, and eternal destiny — though the time spent there may not be days, months, or years as we reckon them, but a moment, as in the twinkling of an eye. Those who believe there will be an interval between death and resurrection argue that on the Day of Judgement, all will rise together.

That brings us to the subject of resurrection. What really is a resurrection? Though the term is not found in the Old Testament, I am inclined to accept the definition found in Hosea 13:14a, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction." The meaning of this passage may be that from the power of death and the grave, Jesus will redeem and recover us. He has already redeemed us, in our life before death, through His sacrificial death on the Cross, and

will now proceed to redeem us from death and the grave. It may sound confusing: this second redemption may be the resurrection of our inner self, or soul, by which we are brought into His magnificent presence. Some believe that upon death the soul comes at once into the presence of Jesus, and that on the last day, at the resurrection, the body will be raised to receive back the soul. Assuming that we were born perfect in body, it seems unlikely, after the process of ageing and the abuse the body sustains, that Jesus would wish to reunite a deficient body with a glorified soul. I would not want my present body back for my eternal life with my Lord. What matters is where our souls will be for eternity. The Bible teaches that the soul is the entire person, not merely some part that survives death: the person I am is my soul. Close your eyes, and meditate upon the person that you are. You will see yourself apart from your body, and that inner self is your soul.

I believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ. One may ask what purpose it would serve, if not for judgement, and for sending the resurrected to their eternal destinations. Jesus created everything that was made. Fallen man corrupted, and all but destroyed, the fine balance of what God had created. Jesus came into the world, and redeemed humanity through His death upon the Cross. At His second coming, I believe, He will take us into His New Creation, the Kingdom of God, of which He so often spoke. Amen.

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