

Men's Discipleship

False Religions: Seventh Day Adventist Part 5

Nature of Death and Intermediate State (Soul Sleep)

- **SDA teaching:** Adventists deny an immediately conscious afterlife. They teach that “death is an unconscious state for all people” until the resurrection szu.adventist.org. They believe that when one dies, the soul “sleeps” (unaware) until Christ returns. This concept of “soul sleep” leads them to reject the idea of a conscious, disembodied existence.
- **Historic Protestant (WCF/LBCF):** The Protestant tradition affirms that souls do not sleep. WCF 32.1 declares that the bodies decay, “but their souls (which neither die nor sleep), having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them.” The righteous are “received into the highest heavens... waiting for the full redemption of their bodies,” while the wicked “are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness” thewestminsterstandard.org. The 1689 Confession echoes this: “*The bodies of men... return to dust... but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them*” gracebaptistcarlisle.org. No notion of unconscious sleep is taught; rather, believers go to be with Christ (Phil. 1:21-24, Gal. 2:20) and sinners to conscious punishment (Luke 16:23-24).
- **Puritan commentary:** Reformed divines like Richard Baxter and John Owen affirmed an immediate post-mortem state. Owen wrote on Romans 5:8 that upon death the believer’s soul “is present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8), and Baxter called denial of personal existence after death “a strange and pernicious opinion.” The Puritan consensus, following Jesus’ promise to the thief (Luke 23:43) and Paul’s teaching (Phil. 1:23), is that souls awake at death, either to joy or torment – precisely the opposite of Adventist “sleep.”
- **Biblical note:** Scripture contrasts the fate of the wicked (“It is appointed for men to die once... then face judgment,” Heb. 9:27) with the blessed assurance of immediate presence with Christ (Luke 23:43). Ecclesiastes 12:7 speaks of the spirit returning to God at death, not “sleeping.” Adventists point to verses like Ecclesiastes 9:5,6 (“the dead know not”), but historic Protestants interpret those verses idiomatically, not literally (see Revelation 6:9–11, where martyrs under the altar cry out).

Category	Seventh-day Adventist (Soul Sleep)	Protestant (Conscious Intermediate State)
Nature of the Soul	Soul is <i>mortal</i> ; humans are a unified being of body + breath (Gen. 2:7). At death, a person ceases to be conscious.	Soul is <i>immortal</i> and continues consciously after death. At death, body returns to dust, but soul persists with awareness (Eccl. 12:7; Matt. 10:28).

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	Immortality belongs to God alone (1 Tim. 6:16).	
State of the Dead	Death is an <i>unconscious sleep</i> until resurrection. “The dead know nothing” (Eccl. 9:5). Thoughts perish (Ps. 146:4). Dead await resurrection (1 Thess. 4:13–16).	Death ushers the soul into <i>immediate conscious existence</i> . Believers “depart and be with Christ” (Phil. 1:23). Souls “neither die nor sleep” (WCF 32.1).
Terminology	Frequent use of “sleep” as literal: Lazarus “sleeps” (John 11:11–14); Paul says believers “sleep” (1 Cor. 15:51).	“Sleep” is metaphorical, describing appearance of the body in death. Souls remain awake and active (Rev. 6:9–10; Heb. 12:23).
Hope of Believers	Hope is in the <i>resurrection</i> , when Christ awakens the dead (John 5:28–29). Eternal life begins at resurrection, not before.	Hope is in both immediate fellowship with Christ after death and the future resurrection of the body. Assurance: “Today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).
Condition of the Wicked Dead	Also unconscious until the second resurrection, then judged and destroyed (annihilationist view).	Wicked souls go immediately to conscious torment in hell/Hades (Luke 16:22–26; WCF 32.1).
Historical Sources	Ellen G. White: death is unconscious; belief in immortal soul is Satan’s Edenic lie (<i>Great Controversy</i> , pp. 533–534). SDA Fundamental Belief #26: “Death is an unconscious state for all people.”	Westminster Confession of Faith (32.1): Souls “which neither die nor sleep...immediately return to God.” 1689 Baptist Confession (31.1) mirrors this. Calvin’s <i>Psychopannychia</i> and Puritans like Watson and Owen strongly reject soul sleep.
Practical Implications	Protects against spiritualism and belief in ghosts/saints; stresses finality of death and the resurrection hope.	Provides assurance that believers are already with Christ; pastoral comfort that loved ones are alive in His presence.
Main Criticism by Other Protestants	Seen as denying the soul’s immortality and undermining immediate comfort of heaven.	Adventists argue Reformed view relies on Greek dualism/philosophy, not pure Scripture.