



"All changes, even the most longed for, have their melancholy; for what we leave behind us is a part of ourselves; we must die to one life before we can enter another."

—Anatole France

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What Happened to the Thief on the Cross? (Part Two)

As we saw in Part One, Scripture shows plainly that Jesus's body and soul were in "Hades"—the grave—for [three days and three nights](#), starting on the day He died. He was not in Paradise, and thus neither was the criminal crucified beside Him. Even so, [Luke 23:46](#) seems to say that Jesus—or at least part of Him—*was* with the Father in Paradise that very same day: "And when [Jesus](#) had cried out with a loud voice, He said, 'Father, "into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" Having said this, He breathed His last."

Because of the widespread assumption that mankind possesses an [immortal soul](#) and that even in death the consciousness of a person lives on absent his or her body, many will take [Luke 23:46](#) to mean that Jesus *was* with the Father that day in spirit form. Subsequently, they will assume that the criminal could have been as well.

However, the larger issue is what the Bible consistently shows happens at—and after—death. Yes, the spirits of both Jesus and the criminal returned to [God](#) the Father, as do the spirits of all people ([Ecclesiastes 3:21](#); [12:7](#)). Yet, at the same time, their *consciousness* ended, such that it could *not* be said that they—their complete persons—were with the Father. Jesus committed His spirit to the Father, yet He clearly told Mary after His resurrection, "I have not yet ascended to My Father" ([John 20:17](#)).

What does it mean that His spirit was with the Father, but not His body or soul? Was His spirit conscious of being in Paradise? Notice what the Word of God says:

- "For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks?" ([Psalm 6:5](#)). Thus, there is no praise of God or even contemplation of Him when a person goes into the grave—yet the spirit is with God!
- "Shall Your lovingkindness be declared in the grave? Or Your faithfulness in the place of destruction? Shall Your wonders be known in the dark? And Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?" ([Psalm 88:11-12](#)). The psalmist calls the grave "the place of destruction," "the

dark," and "the land of forgetfulness." Consequently, death is a definite stopping point, and consciousness and experience do not continue in the grave.

- "The dead do not praise the LORD, nor any who go down into silence" ([Psalm 115:17](#)). If the dead are automatically taken to the presence of God, why would they not praise Him? How could any being remain silent in the presence of the most awesome Person in the universe?
- "*His spirit departs*, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish" ([Psalm 146:4](#); our emphasis throughout). A person's spirit departs (and returns to God, as [Ecclesiastes 3:21](#) and [12:7](#) show), yet at that point all of his plans (*thoughts*, KJV) perish. This is because the human spirit does not have consciousness inherent within it.
- "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for *there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave* where you are going" ([Ecclesiastes 9:10](#)). It could not be any clearer: The condition of death means a total cessation of consciousness and awareness.

In biblical usage, death is pictured as sleeping—there is no knowledge, no comprehension of the passage of time, no recognition of God, etc. There is no consciousness. The spirit in man allows understanding ([Job 32:8](#); [1 Corinthians 2:11](#)), but it depends on a living body for consciousness. The idea that some eternal consciousness continues after death comes from paganism, not the Holy Scriptures! The spirit in man, in its most basic definition, is a person's mind (heart, attitudes, etc.), not a separate sentient being.

As a result, even though all the spirits of all the dead throughout human history have returned to the Father, Jesus' statement, "No one has ever gone into heaven" ([John 3:13](#)), demonstrates that the "spirit in man" is *not* the entire person, just a *component*. Yet, that component, absent a body (physical or spiritual) that can sustain life, has no consciousness of its own. The spirit is given or returned to a body—physical or spiritual—at the time of a resurrection ([Luke 8:55](#)). Jesus' spirit returned to the Father, yet *He*—the Man, the Son of God, the whole Being—did not ascend to the Father until after He was resurrected three days and three nights later.

There is still more to be added to our understanding of the issues involved in the story of the [thief on the cross](#), which we will discover in Part Three.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[A Primer On Spirit](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Spiritual entities, such as words and ideas, are powerful and potentially dangerous if used for evil purposes. We can be easily manipulated if we do not guard our minds. Politicians and advertisers unscrupulously use the prevailing Zeitgeist to manipulate, trap, and control gullible people. Spirit is an invisible force, the effects of which are abundantly clear by its manifestations. Spirit can be discerned by carefully thinking through and taking stock of its multiple effects. The Holy Spirit can be described as the mind and creative power of Almighty God. The spirit in man is an immaterial quality that empowers, giving the power of intellect, controlling the sensory modalities, giving us the

ability to be self-aware. Spirit gives humans the power to think spatially, use language, invent, and plan for the future. We have never seen this spirit, but we use it every day. Words have the invisible power to encode thoughts, motivating people to feel or accomplish something. Words can inspire or defile, motivate or depress. The source of all sin is in the spirit or thought processes. Satan and his demonic forces use words to corrupt the vast majority of humankind, including ourselves. The only antidote to these vile thought processes is the Word of God. We have been mandated to choose to either follow God's pure, liberating, and clean Holy Spirit rather than to choose to yield to Satan's unholy, vile, enslaving, and dirty spirit. We absorb God's Holy Spirit by imbibing in His Word, spending as much time with God as possible.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Jesus and 'the Spirits in Prison'](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Peter's statement that Jesus 'preached to the spirits in prison' (I Peter 3:19) has for years baffled many a Bible student. Richard Ritenbaugh examines this verse in context, showing that the traditional interpretation is woefully off-base to the point of suggesting a totally unbiblical conclusion.

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