

The Intermediate State.

No four

In writing about our heavenly hope, I don't want to create the impression that heaven is our final destination. In heaven the glorified believer is not complete. He is without his body and awaits the resurrection of the body upon Christ's return to this earth. Even our heavenly home is therefore only the intermediate state in our journey with God. The life of human beings fall into three stages.

"First, there is the state from birth to death," observes the Reformed theologian Loraine Boettner, "which is life in the present world and in the natural body; second, life between death and the resurrection, in the intermediate state, which is life without the body; and, third, life in the resurrection body, which is the final and eternal state."

The Bible does not teach soul sleep. Our fellowship with God cannot be broken at death. Our faith in Christ and obedience to Him reach beyond death. Jesus said: "He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25f.). Our Lord goes with us through the valley of the shadow of death (Ps.23). We gain immeasurably when we cross the river death and enter the land of the truly living. "To be away from the body is to be at home with the Lord" (2 Cor.5: 8). We have arrived then in the place where we belong and are welcomed. In heaven we will join Enoch who was taken by God, by passing death (Gen. 5: 24), the prophet Elijah who went to heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11) and the apostle Paul who longed to be with Christ for that would be far better (Phil. 1: 23). We will meet the great cloud of witnesses already in heaven (Hebr.12: 1). These witnesses sit as spectators in the benches and watch the believers here below, who are still running the race marked out for them. The church triumphant and the church militant belong to each other. The saints in heaven see what we do not see as yet, but believe: the glorious triumph of God over all His enemies and the preparations for the coming new world. The intermediate state is a state of true liberty and perfect enjoyment of God; nevertheless it is in some respect a state of imperfection. For example, the promised rewards won't be given until the second coming of Jesus. Paul says that there is for him "the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing"(2 Tim.4: 8). So Paul had not received his crown for "that day" had not yet come. For that day Paul and all the saints in heaven are still waiting.