

Out of Body Experiences

There is a rash of new books, TV programs, and newspaper articles describing "near death" or "out of body experiences." Is there any truth in these "encounters" by people who have been near death or supposedly died and were revived? I don't doubt that every one of those involved had some kind of experience. The question then, is whether these are valid experiences or simply within the mind of the person involved.

The Scriptures proclaim loud and clear that once the spirit has left the body, the body is dead, and that the spirit cannot return to this earthly body until the final resurrection when our Lord returns. Then it will not be this body as we know it but a resurrection body created by God just for this purpose. (Isa 26:14; Jas 2:26; Eccl. 9:5; Job 7:9; 14:10-12; Eccl. 8:8)

2Co 12:3 And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) Most scholars agree Paul is speaking about one of his own experiences in this passage; perhaps connected to the incident when he was stoned and left for dead outside the city (Acts 14:19-20). The Apostle, here admits that he doesn't understand what happened (in the body or out). All other references in Scripture clearly indicate that a vision or dream is involved and that body and soul were still intact. Therefore, we have no Scriptural basis for believing out of the body experiences are possible. In Reformed Theology no doctrine can be based on one verse of Scripture. This is especially true for those shadowy areas where Scripture as a whole is silent.

I believe that such experiences are easily explained without there having been an out of body experience. Have you ever watched a computer terminal during a brown out, or a television just before the power went off? When the power to an electronic device begins to decline, everything appears normal for a moment. However, just before the power level declines to the point where any operation of the device can be sustained, it reaches a point where weird things happen on the screen. The human brain is an electronic device. When deprived of the things needed to sustain it, or when subjected to great shock (physical or chemical) weird things happen. I am not surprised that someone who has been close to death where the brain has begun to shut itself down would have had paranormal mental experiences during this time of shock or depravity.

Priests, medicine men, and other religious leaders (including Christians and Jews) have often fasted for long periods of time in order to have clearer vision. Are they seeing spiritual things more clearly, or is the brain beginning to shut down? Can God use such times to speak more clearly to a person, than when their mind is running full steam ahead with the things of this life? God can do what He wants, how He wants, when He wants, and where He wants; He is God.

When such an experience does not contradict Scripture, I see no harm. Can these experiences be from God? I do not know, but, God knows. I do know from Scripture that the experience is in the body. As noted above the Scriptures are clear that once the spirit (soul and spirit are synonyms) leaves the body, the body is dead and will not live again.

This does not deny the Scriptural accounts of people being raised from the dead. God is God and can do whatever He desires. These were supernatural events and are very scarce through the centuries of Scriptural history. Whereas, these out of body experiences are very common place, especially during the last century.

If such an experience were from God, it would serve some purpose. Many who have had such experiences have lived God denying lives before the experience and continue the same degenerate life style after the experience. Yet, they indicate they stood on the threshold of heaven and believe that they would have entered this after life paradise if they had not returned to their body. They all tell how much comfort they have derived from the experience and knowing there is life after death. No way Hosea! The Bible teaches us that there is life after death, but only the redeemed of the lamb will taste this eternal life. The redeemed of the lamb live like it.

If such an experience is from God it will not contradict, take away, nor add to the Scriptures as God has delivered them to us. There will be no new revelation from God that will set aside the smallest point of Scripture until our Lord returns. We must test all subjective experiences (supernatural or otherwise) by the Scriptures. We live by the Word of God, not subjective feelings and experiences. Trusting God's Word, having faith in God, is the only way to please God (Hebrews 11:6). It is also the only real comfort that will bring peace in this life.

Does life and death meet in this life? Only in the sense that life and death are present in all human beings at birth. Man is dead in the flesh and can only live by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. Once the spirit leaves the body, it is dead forever. Yes, there will be a resurrection at the last day. No, it will not be a body as we know it now. Is it possible for someone to have glimpses of heaven and things to come? Yes, the Scriptures declare, Abraham longed to see the day of Christ and did. Are "near-death" experiences real? Only God knows for sure, but, if they exist, they are not "out-of-body" experiences. The testimony of the Scriptures is the only truth we can trust. From the verses above I believe all will agree that the soul and body cannot be separated and then restored again except in two circumstances; by supernatural action God raises someone from the dead as a few were so raised from the biblical record and on that great day of the Lord when the dead shall rise to stand before the Lamb in judgment.

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