

Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection from the Dead: the Biblical Witness

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The biblical hope of immortality has been one of the most confusing subjects of Christian teaching for much of the last two thousand years. The original, simple and clear Christian belief of gaining immortality or eternal life was based solely on the truth that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead – never to die again – which was to be the pattern for all other believers to follow at Christ’s return. This Christian hope is set forth throughout the New Testament documents and is the *only* basis for the Christian hope of immortality.

The Bible teaches repeatedly that all men are mortal and, therefore, subject to death. We must therefore begin by asking, “what happens to the Christian believer when he or she dies?” The Book of Acts answers this question specifically when speaking about the death of Stephen:

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then, he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep (Acts 7:59-60; cf. Luke 23:46).

According to the New Testament, at death, the “spirit” is committed to Christ in heaven and the believer “falls asleep” in Christ. According to Hebrews 12:23, “the spirits of righteous men made perfect” are apparently in heaven awaiting the resurrection. However, according to other NT passages like I Cor. 15 and I Thess. 4, the believer continues to “sleep in Christ” until the time of the future bodily resurrection and transformation of the whole person at Christ’s return. It is only *then* that the gift of immortality is received. Though many biblical scholars who reject the idea of the immortality of the soul do believe that the Bible teaches, or may teach, some sort of conscious or semi-conscious ‘intermediate state’ for believers “with Christ” in-between death and resurrection, we must be very careful here. For *nowhere* does the New Testament ever say that Christian believers who fall asleep in Christ have a *conscious existence*

with Christ in heaven in-between death and resurrection. Though believers may indeed be said to be “with Christ” in some corporate or spiritual sense in-between death and resurrection, the Old and New Testaments’ consistent portrayal of believers during this time is one of *unconscious* “sleep” and “rest” *in the grave* as they await their “awakening” to resurrection life at Christ’s return (cf. Psalm 13:3; 146:4; 6:5; Ecc. 9:4-6, 10; Dan. 12:2, 13; John 5:24-29; Acts 7:59; I Cor. 15:6, 18, 20, 51; I Thess. 4:13, 14, 15; 5:10). If there is something beyond this, the Bible certainly never explains it. For this reason, as James Dunn states, the question of an intermediate state is simply “a moot point”. For regardless of the exact state of the believer between death and resurrection there can be no question that biblically, believers will receive the gift of *immortality* only at Christ’s second coming. Hence, as Dunn states, “the **impossibility** of translating Paul’s hope into a belief in ‘the immortality of the soul’” (*The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 489-90).

Thus, leaving all speculation aside about the possibility of a so-called intermediate state, the clear biblical sequence of events whereby believers receive the gift of immortality from God is specifically explained in Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians. It is based on Christ’s own death and resurrection in which he gained victory over death both for himself and for all of God’s people to follow:

*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. **For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then when he comes, those who belong to him.** Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power (I Cor. 15:20-24).*

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”, the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from [of] heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from [of] heaven, so are also those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so we shall bear the likeness of the man from [of] heaven.

*I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. **For the perishable put clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”***

*“Where, O death, is your victory?
Where O death, is your sting?”*

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (I Cor. 15:42-57).

The original Christian hope was clear: eternal life, or immortality, was to be received as a gift from God through resurrection and/or transformation of the whole person at Christ’s return. However, soon after the ink had barely dried on the New Testament documents this Christian belief of gaining immortality or eternal life through the power of God at Christ’s return was either totally replaced by, or mixed together with, the Platonic Greek doctrine of the immortality of the soul. This pagan doctrine, which totally contradicts the biblical concept of man, greatly diminished the need for the Christian hope of a final bodily resurrection of the whole person at Christ’s return. For if man’s immortal soul has already found its final resting place “in bliss” in

heaven why is there still a need for a bodily resurrection and transformation to inherit eternal life – that is, the life of the age to come in the glorious kingdom of God at Christ’s return?

Owing to a misunderstanding of biblical terminology and biblical concepts this particular question vexed the so-called early Christian Fathers in the first five centuries just after the New Testament era and it has vexed truth-seeking Christians ever since. But let it be plainly stated that *nowhere* does the Bible ever speak in terms of the immortality of the soul or of an innate natural immortality of man. According to the Bible, only God is naturally immortal and immortality is the gift of God to be received by believers at the resurrection of the just (Dan. 12:2; John 5:28; Luke 20:27-38).

Since unbelievers never receive the gift of immortality - even though they will be raised in order to be judged and condemned at the final judgment - there is no logical basis for the idea that they will be tormented *forever* in hell. Instead, as mortals, their end, or destiny, is, as Paul said, “destruction” (Phil. 3:19); or, as John puts it, they will “perish” (John 3:16). The common idea of eternal torment for the ungodly is the result of reading the Bible in the light of pagan Greek concepts rather than against the background of biblical Hebraic concepts. This is a process that began just after New Testament times and has been thoroughly documented by any number of highly respected Christian scholars.

Unfortunately, due to the influential writings of church leaders such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas the biblical doctrine of the bodily resurrection of the whole person – though not entirely lost – was submerged under many, many centuries of Christian belief in the immortality of the soul. This idea was especially promulgated through the art and literature of the Middle Ages including through works such as the fraudulent *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Apocalypse of Paul* as well as Dante’s *Inferno* – each of which portrayed the horrific and eternal sufferings of the ungodly in hell.

It is only recently – primarily in the second half of the 20th century – that biblical scholarship as a whole has finally and firmly regained the original biblical understanding both of the nature of man, and, the corresponding biblical hope of immortality. In order to show just how wide-spread this

knowledge is among biblical scholars today – ranging across all denominational boundaries from Roman Catholic to Protestant – the rest of this article will be entirely devoted to quotations from highly regarded standard reference works about this subject.

For those interested, an excellent summary of the Ancient Greek, OT, NT, and post-NT understanding of the concepts of “immortality” and “soul” can be found in the *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd Edition, ed. Everett Ferguson, Garland Publishing – available from CBD – with first class articles on the concepts of “Immortality” and “Soul” written by Richard A. Norris, Professor Emeritus, Union Theological Seminary, New York. I will be glad to send anyone interested a xeroxed copy of these articles – just write or e-mail me. Also, highly recommended along these lines, is James D.G. Dunn’s explanation of Paul’s terminology in his highly acclaimed recent work *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. In this light, we should especially heed Dunn’s words when he warns on p. 56,

“... that reading Paul’s anthropology in the light of modern usage or of ancient Greek usage is likely to distort our appreciation of Paul’s thought from the outset.”

It is hoped that the information that follows will help to restore the true biblical hope of immortality – based on the power of God exhibited in raising our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead – to the glory and praise of God the Father! (Phil. 2:6-11).

The Ancient Greek and Biblical Views on the Subjects of Immortality and the Soul

I will begin this section with a short quotation from a lecture entitled “Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead: the New Testament Witness” given by the Swiss NT scholar Oscar Cullmann in 1955. Cullmann, who at one time was simultaneously a Professor of Theology at universities in Switzerland, France and the U.S.A., was enormously influential in helping to bring the biblical perspective of salvation-history back to its proper place at the center of biblical studies. Indeed, much of the work on this entire field of studies was sparked by his books and lectures. I quote here from his lecture, as later published in the book,

Immortality and Resurrection, ed. Krister Stendahl, The Macmillan Company, 1965, p. 9:

“If we were to ask an ordinary Christian today (whether well-read Protestant or Catholic, or not) what he conceives to be the New Testament teaching concerning the fate of man after death, with few exceptions we should get the answer: “The immortality of the soul.” **Yet this widely accepted idea is one of the greatest misunderstandings of Christianity.** There is no point in attempting to hide this fact, or to veil it by reinterpreting the Christian faith. This is something that should be discussed quite candidly. **The concept of death and resurrection is anchored in the Christ-event, and hence it is incompatible with the Greek belief in immortality; because it is based on salvation-history it is offensive to modern thought.** Is it not such an integral element of the early Christian proclamation that it can neither be surrendered no reinterpreted without robbing the New Testament of its substance?”

Cullmann stated later that he was widely criticized for his article since many people considered it to be destructive of ideas and concepts which they had become accustomed to in their church life. Nevertheless, its effect was like the dropping of a bomb in the midst of a Christian world which for a century and a half had been dominated by the Platonic view of the immortality of the soul that was promoted by liberal Christianity. His influence can be seen in many of the following articles from which I will quote.

A good summary of the ancient Greek and biblical views on this subject is to be found in *The Eerdman’s Bible Dictionary*, Eerdman’s Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1987, “Immortality”, p. 518.

“The question of human immortality inevitably involves a comparison of biblical and Greek views of the subject. The Greek view, expounded classically in Plato’s *Phaedo*, is based on an anthropological dualism of body and soul. The body is gross, corruptible, subject to illusion. The soul, on the other hand, is immortal, eternal, essentially divine, and in a sense infallible, belonging properly to the realm of the ideal. In this life the soul is imprisoned in

the body, which easily tyrannizes over the soul. Hence life ought to be a process of liberation, the weaning of the soul away from alien matter through engagement with the eternal ideas that lie behind material things. Death is the culmination of the process, the final liberation of the soul from the body, and thus is a friend and not an enemy; through death the soul is released from the prison of the body to its true home. This view is noble, full of apparent light, answers to an important dimension of human experience (the sense of alienation), and is attractive. It has influenced both Hellenistic Judaism and the history of Christian thought. Indeed, the salvation of the “immortal soul” has sometimes been a commonplace of in preaching, **but it is fundamentally unbiblical. Biblical anthropology is not dualistic but monistic: human being consists in the integrated wholeness of body and soul, and the Bible never contemplates the disembodied existence of the soul in bliss.** Death is the enemy of this integrity and not the friend of the soul. Immortality, in Greek thought, is of the nature of the soul, which is essentially unaffected by death except insofar as it is liberated. This involves no conflict, but rather is a peaceful escape from creation. **Biblical immortality, on the contrary, is an end, which is achieved through a dramatic conflict with death and involves a new creation in which the integrity of body and soul is restored and perfected.”**

“Since Hebrew thought has no concept of the independent existence of the soul, it is natural that the hope for eternal life should eventually be recognized as a hope for resurrection ...The idea becomes fully visible in Daniel, where eternal life is seen to entail a double bodily resurrection of “some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2). Daniel’s doctrine of eternal life is hardly, as some have maintained, influenced by the Greek view of the immortality of the soul; it is the reawakening of those “who sleep in the dust of the earth” and therefore, in keeping with Hebrew anthropology.”

“Paul speaks of immortality only in connection with the resurrection of the body. The presence of the Spirit within the believer

now, in fact, is the guarantee of the ultimate re-clothing of the resurrection body (2 Cor. 5:5), which Paul likens to Christ’s “glorious body” (Phil. 3:21) – a “spiritual” body (I Cor. 15:44) now animated by the power of the Holy Spirit rather than subject to the power of sin and death. What is sown perishable, dishonored, weak, physical, and mortal is to be raised imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual, and immortal (vv. 42-44, 53). Mortality is not so much as left behind as “swallowed up by life” (2 Cor. 5:4).

Many similar works can be consulted to confirm what is said here and such action is encouraged.

Problematic Sections of Scripture about the “Soul”

Of course, were there not ambiguities in certain biblical sections there would be no conflict over these matters. Reasonable people have, over the years, come to different conclusions based on the evidence. Therefore, four verses, or sections of scripture, that are commonly used to prove the immortality of the soul should perhaps be examined first. To begin with, Gen. 2:7:

The Lord God formed the man from the dust of ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being (NIV).

This verse has caused no end of confusion due to the KJV translation “and the man became a living soul” which is known by heart far and wide in the Christian world. I’ll never forget how long it took me to properly understand this verse after many years of grounding in the beautiful King James Version. However, beautiful as it is, the KJV is misleading here as in many places - and the NIV is correct, as can be seen by consulting any modern translation or commentary. Commenting on Gen. 2:7 in his book *Contours of Old Testament Theology*, the Protestant scholar Bernard W. Anderson, Emeritus Professor of Old Testament at Princeton University Seminary, states,

“Human nature is not a dichotomy – a body of mortal flesh and a deathless soul, as in some philosophies, but rather a unity of body and spirit, an animated body ... This view is expressed classically in Genesis 2, according to which the Lord God infused

“spirit” (life force) into a lump of clay and “it became a living being.” The Hebrew word should not be translated “soul”, if that means an immortal essence, but rather “person” or “self”. The self is a unity of body and spirit, a psychosomatic unity ... **In this view, death must be taken seriously ... Death is a total event – there is no part of human nature, such as an immortal soul, that is untouched.**”

This understanding of Gen. 2:7 can be confirmed by the celebrated Roman Catholic publication *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer and Roland Murphy, p. 1295:

In spite of the use of such words as flesh, spirit, and soul, the OT conceived of the human being as a unity and not as a composite of different principles. H. Wheeler Robinson observed in a classic remark that the Greeks thought of an incarnate spirit and the Israelites thought of an animated body ... **The Hebrew *nefesh* (*nephesh*) has usually been mistranslated ‘soul’ – introducing an idea that is foreign to the OT ...** When Yaweh breathes the spirit, the human being becomes a living *nefesh* (2:7). “Person” or “self” may be the basic, if not the primitive meaning of the word. The blood is sometimes said to be the seat of the *nefesh*; in such instances *nefesh* is not the self or the person, but rather life, which is poured out with the blood... **In none of these instances is there anything resembling the “soul” of Greek and modern thought.** This difference has important corollaries in the biblical idea of survival after death.

Many other commentaries can be consulted to confirm this understanding of Gen. 2:7 and of the meaning of the OT Hebrew word “nefesh” or the Greek word “psyche” in the New Testament.

The second problematic verse that has long caused confusion is Matt.10:28:

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot touch the soul. Rather be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell (NIV).

On the surface this verse seems to indicate that the soul is immortal, but in fact, it teaches just the

opposite. From among many other commentators on this verse I quote the highly respected *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged Version*, p 1349:

“Matt. 10:28 presents God as the one who can cast both body and *psyche* (soul, life) into Gehenna. **The saying posits the unity of the two and negates the idea of the soul’s immortality** ... God alone controls the *psyche*, and for those who have true life with him he prepares a new body, just as he destroys both the body and *psyche* of those who do not have true life with him.”

The third group of verses concerns the biblical language “the salvation of your souls” which has become popular in preaching and commonplace in Christian thinking and speaking. Though the phrases are certainly biblical, the concepts are Hebraic, not Greek. When we read these phrases through the eyes of our Graeco-Roman culture we get a misleading idea of what is being said. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3, “Soul”, ed. Colin Brown, p. 685-6, explains the meaning of these verses in their biblical context:

“Although the Hellenistic term *psyche* appears more frequently in the later epistles of the NT than in other parts (I Peter 1:9, James1:21, 5:20), **it must not be imagined that this implies the concept of the soul as the real and valuable part of man, the eternal and permanent element. That would be a misunderstanding. This kind of thinking deduces the immortality and permanence of the soul from its own particular quality. This is just what the NT does not teach ... no reference is intended to the immortal soul as guarantee or substance of eternal life.** Although such passages show definite traces of Hellenism, they are nonetheless brought on to a rather different level by biblical tradition, basic eschatological insights, and the Christian experience in the risen Lord... **The soul is simply that area in which decisions are made concerning life and death, salvation and destruction.** Moreover, every statement about the *psyche* in the NT is linked in context with eschatological statements about renewal and resurrection. Outside such a context this line of

thought is impossible. Part of this context of ideas is the teaching that God is judge, that his judgement determines whether the soul shall be saved or destroyed, and the fact that the salvation of the soul is always understood in connection with the resurrection of the body, i.e. a new embodiment of the soul.”

And finally, Revelation 6:9-11, perhaps the most controversial of all because it appears on the surface that there are souls alive after death:

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They cried out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the earth and avenge our blood?” The each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait [rest KJV] a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed (NIV).

At first glance, based on a modern Western philosophical reading of this text against the background of Graeco-Roman and New Age culture, this looks like immortal souls living and speaking in some sort of intermediate state. But a few points should be made right off the bat. First, the translation “souls” is by no means a sure thing. This Greek word could be translated as “life”, “persons”, “souls” and even “bodies.” The Greek word *psyche* does not, of itself, imply the translation “soul”. Second, these souls are not in a state of perfection, nor are they in their final resting place, nor is it even said that they are “with Christ.” Instead, rather than being thankful that they have escaped the prison house of the body, these souls are looking forward to a future time in which they will finally be vindicated and perfected. According to Revelation 20:4, that future time is the resurrection of the just.

Finally, given the overall scheme and language of the Book of Revelation it is most likely that the entire incident and language that is portrayed here is simply imagery and not to be taken literally. Many scholars take this view, including the highly respected evangelical scholar G.E. Ladd. In his *A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, p. 103-104 states the following about Rev. 6:9-11:

“In the present instance, the altar is clearly the altar of sacrifice where sacrificial blood was poured. **The fact that John saw the souls of martyrs under the altar has nothing to do with the state of the dead or their situation in the intermediate state;** it is merely a vivid way of picturing the fact that they had been martyred in the name of God. In the Old Testament ritual blood of sacrificial victims was poured out at the base of the altar (Lev. 4:7). The souls of martyrs are seen under the altar as though they had been sacrificed upon the altar and their blood poured out as its base. Christian thought often employs the language of sacrificial death. Facing death, the apostle Paul wrote, “For I am already on the point of being sacrificed” (II Tim. 4:6). At an earlier date, also facing possible death, he had written, “Even if I am to be poured out as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad” (Phil. 2:17). Thus Christian martyrs are viewed as sacrifices offered to God. In fact, they were slain on the earth and their blood wet the ground; but in Christian faith, the sacrifice was really made in heaven where their souls were offered at the heavenly altar.”

The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Vol. 3, “Soul”, p. 686, echoes the same thought:

“In Rev. 6:9 and 20:4 mention is made of the souls of those who have been slain, who are under the altar of God in heaven, i.e. under the altar in the heavenly counterpart of the temple. This imagery is probably based on the fact that the blood of sacrifice was poured out before or on the altar (Lev. 4:7). The martyrs who have shed their blood for Christ’s sake, are compared with the sacrifices. That is why their souls are under the altar, since the soul, i.e. the life, is in the blood. The dominant thought is that the souls which have been won by God, which have been saved, which believe in him and sacrifice themselves for him, are preserved in his keeping; and **they are inextricably bound up with the realization of God’s aims and place, in his heavenly world with its future destiny and its future appearance upon earth.**”

Short Quotations from Research Works

I will continue now with various short quotations from recognized research works and those readers who are interested can consult the works cited for greater detail if they desire to do so:

James D. G. Dunn is the Lightfoot Professor of Divinity at the University of Durham, England. He sets forth his understanding of this subject in his recent book *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Eerdmans, p. 76:

“Paul uses *psyche* just 13 times, 4 of them in Romans. This itself is in striking contrast to the regular use of the term in classical Greek and of *nephesh* in the OT (756 times). **The difference between Hebrew and Greek anthropology becomes as clear here as anywhere.** For in classical Greek usage the *psyche* is “the essential core of man which can be separated from his body and which does not share in the body’s dissolution.” Here is the origin of the concept of “the immortality of the soul,” as the continuing existence of an inner, hidden part of the human person after death. **In contrast, in Hebrew thought, *nephesh* denotes the whole person, the “living *nephesh*” of Gen. 2:7. Paul’s usage clearly echoes the typical Hebrew mind-set.”**

Stanley B. Marrow is a Jesuit Roman Catholic Scholar who obtained his Licentiate in Scripture from the Pontifical Institute in Rome and his Doctorate in Theology from the Gregorian University. He has been a Professor of NT at the Biblical Institute in Rome and universities in the USA. I quote from his book, *Paul: His Letters and His Theology*, p. 229-230:

“The first thing that should be said about the answer Paul himself gives about the question ‘What is Man?’ is that it is not ours – certainly not that of our habitual way of thinking and speaking. We understand “man” to be made up of body and soul – one material and perishable, which is destined to return to the dust whence it came, and the other spiritual and immortal, which is what survives of us after death. Death for us is the separation of the soul from the body. The spiritual soul, we believe, receives its just recompense immediately after death and awaits the resurrection of its body at the resurrection of the dead on the last day.

Anything farther from Paul’s response to “What is Man?” is hard to imagine. For Paul, as for the biblical authors, when the *pneuma* leaves my body, then I, all of me, die. This by the way, is how Jesus himself died: ‘he yielded up his spirit (*pneuma*)’ (Matt. 27:50, “he breathed his last” (Lk. 23:46).

When this mortal creature comes to the end of his days, then he dies – all of him, not just his body, nor only his flesh and blood, nor only his mind and his heart, but all of him; body and soul, flesh and spirit, heart and mind, what of him is visible and what is invisible – all die. The rich multiplicity of biblical terms, both technical and traditional, employed by Paul to describe this mortal creature, describes only aspects and facets of the individual. Thus, “body” describes him in his relation to other individuals and to other things; “mind” refers to his innermost thoughts; “flesh,” to his mortality and fragility; “heart,” to the seat of his intentions, thoughts, and affections; “soul” (*psyche*), to the individual life that ends in death; “spirit” (*pneuma*), to the breath of life that the Creator breathed “into his nostrils” (Gen. 2:7).

This is the reason why the resurrection occupies such a central position both in Paul’s theology and his anthropology. **The Christian’s only hope of life after death is resurrection from the dead to eternal life. To forget this basic truth, to get caught up in the endless philosophical debates on “the immortality of the soul,” to wander aimlessly in the labyrinth of vain speculation about the dead, is, ultimately, to render Paul’s anthropology incomprehensible, and his insistence on the resurrection of our “mortal bodies” (Rom. 8:11, 23), superfluous.**

Now, if this is not what one hears growing up in the Roman Catholic Church, it only shows the gap between scholarship and the traditions of men that are upheld in so many churches – both Protestant and Roman Catholic alike. As Hans Schwarz, Professor of Theology and Director of the Institute of Protestant Theology at the University of Regensburg, Germany, points out in his recently published book *Eschatology*, p. 272-280:

“The Roman Catholic Church is not alone in its emphasis on the immortality of the soul. Most Protestant hymns express the hope that after our life on earth our immortal soul will be united with God ... **But can this be maintained on biblical grounds?**”

“When we consult a concordance of the Bible, we find many instances of the term “soul.” But the creation accounts at the beginning of the Bible, where we would expect mention of the human soul, are remarkably quiet about a creation or infusion of the human soul through divine intervention. Genesis 1 simply states that, “God created humankind in his image” (1:27), and in Genesis 2 we hear in more picturesque language that “the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and th man became a living being” (2:7).”

“This distinctions made is not between body and soul but between an lifeless and a living human being. In other words, God created the whole person according to the body (from dust) and then gave this body life through his life-giving breath. This can hardly substantiate the teaching that our “soul” is created immediately by God, while our body came into existence in a mediated way through evolution [the current official Roman Catholic position]. It also runs contrary to the Platonic idea that the body is a prison of the soul.”

“How incompatible the Greek idea of the immortality of the soul and the Christian belief in the resurrection are, is demonstrated by Paul’s own missionary activity [cf. Acts 17 in Athens]. We should also note that, according to Paul, death is not a passage to new life or redemption from our earthly existence, but an enemy that has been overcome by Christ.”

“Paul, and with him the whole New Testament, is not longing for the liberation of the self from the bodily prison, but for the resurrection of the body. He does not hope that from our mortal nature something worthwhile and immortal will survive, but he hopes and is sure that through the resurrection of the body our mortal nature

will be transformed into immortality” (I Cor. 15:35-57).

R.K. Bauckham is a world-renowned scholar in biblical eschatology and has taught at several leading universities. He writes in *New Bible Dictionary*, IVP, 3rd Edition, “Eschatology”, p. 336-7, the following:

“In NT thought, immortality belongs intrinsically to God alone (I Tim. 6:16), while men by their descent from Adam are naturally mortal (Rom. 5:12) ... The Christian hope for life beyond death is not based on the belief that part of man survives death. All men, through their descent from Adam, are naturally mortal. Immortality is the gift of God, which will be attained through the resurrection of the whole person.”

F.F. Bruce, the late Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester, England was often called the Dean of 20th century NT evangelical scholars. In his book, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, Eerdmans, p. 311, he writes the following:

“Paul evidently could not contemplate immortality apart from resurrection; for him a body of some kind was essential to personality. Our traditional thinking about the ‘never dying soul’, which owes so much to our Graeco-Roman heritage, makes it difficult for us to appreciate Paul’s point of view. Except when immortality is ascribed to God himself in the New Testament, it is always of the resurrection body that it is predicated, never of the soul.”

I will close with a quotation from the renowned NT scholar Howard Clark Kee, Professor of Biblical Studies, Emeritus, at Boston University. He writes the following in *The Cambridge Companion to the Bible*, p. 544:

“At times resurrection seems to refer to the restoration of the whole faithful community, as in Ezekiel 37. But in Isaiah 26:19 and Dan. 12:2, it is the faithful individual members of God’s people who are given assurance that their fidelity to God will be rewarded when they are raised up from among the dead.”

“This hope was given concrete expression in the early Christian assurance that God raised Jesus from the dead and that his people will share in the resurrection of the faithful and in the age to come (I Cor. 15). In passages like John 11:25-6, however, the benefits of the resurrection life are seen already being enjoyed by God’s people in the present evil age. In Hellenistic tradition there was a belief that the human soul would be released from the body at death and might ascend to the realm of the eternal and divine. That notion was taken up by

some Jewish thinkers in the Hellenistic period, as Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-4 [from the Apocrypha] attests. **But when Paul describes the state of the faithful in the new age, it is not in terms of a disembodied soul but as a transformed body – the spiritual body (I Cor. 15:35-49). Similarly, in Rev. 20:11-22:5, the righteous find their ultimate joy and fulfillment – not as souls ascending to heaven – but in the new order, the new city, and the new temple, which come down out of heaven to a renewed earth (Rev. 21:10).”**