
The Unity of the Spirit

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"In the Bond of Peace"

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Dear Fellow-Believers:

In this issue of *The Unity of the Spirit* we begin a new calendar year of 2001 and finish the sixth full year of publishing our newsletter. Since many of our readers are fairly new to our publication I have thought it a good idea to repeat past articles from time to time that are of especially abiding significance. That practice will continue with this issue as we delve into the subject of the Christian hope of the glory and immortality which will be received at Christ's second coming.

Perhaps the most significant biblical truths for Christian believers today regard our present status as God's children and our future hope of glory and immortality to come at Christ's return. These truths are the culmination of the biblical story of salvation. They set forth the framework in which both the Bible as a whole, as well as our daily lives as God's children are to be understood. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy sets forth a summary of these liberating truths of the victory over death – that is, the hope of immortality – which God purposed in Christ before the creation of the world for his children; and then, accomplished in history through Christ's death and resurrection:

So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the

beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (II Tim. 1:8-10).

Let us focus on three key elements of this good news of God's purpose as revealed in the gospel message:

First, God's **purpose** for his people which was determined by God, in Christ, before the creation of the world: This is a continual theme of scripture; it was foreshadowed in the Old Testament scriptures, accomplished by Christ's death and resurrection, and, finally, put into effect in the new covenant era through the gift of God's Spirit. Though its final fulfillment is still to come, the process of glorification has already begun in God's people through the indwelling of God's Spirit. Romans chapter 8 summarizes this purpose in its simplicity:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified (Rom. 8:28-30; cf. Eph. 1:3-14).

God's purpose and grace – given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time - is to bring about a family of children who are conformed to the glorious image, or likeness, of his Son. The whole

Bible moves towards the final fulfillment of this purpose. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians shows this:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenlies with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love, he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ (Eph. 1:3-10).

Second, based on this purpose, the actual sending of God's Son for the **accomplishment** of God's plan of salvation after the period of Old Testament preparation had been fulfilled: These truths are set forth clearly in Paul's Letter to the Galatians:

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman born under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, the Spirit who calls out "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir (Gal. 4:4-7).

Finally, as God's children we are heirs. We have the hope of the **final fulfillment** of God's plan of salvation with the glory to come at Christ's second coming. Paul's Letter to the Romans sets this forth in beautiful detail:

The Spirit itself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God

and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not have we wait for it patiently (Rom. 8:16-25).

As God's children we already have the firstfruits of God's Spirit; therefore, the process of glorification has begun (II Cor. 3:18). Yet we still "groan" in our mortal bodies as we wait "in hope" for the "redemption of our bodies" and "the glorious freedom of the children of God" which we will receive at Christ's return. It is only then that we will be "clothed with immortality" (I Cor. 15:53) so that "what is mortal is swallowed up by life" (II Cor. 5:4). Then, and only then, will we be "with Christ, in glory" (Col. 3:4) and gloriously "conformed to the image of God's Son" (Rom. 8:29). The apostle John sums up this great biblical hope:

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

*Dear friends, now we are the children of God, and what we shall be has not yet been made known. But we know that **when he appears, we shall be like him**, for we shall see him as he is (I John 3:1-2).*

Richie Temple

The Nature, Purpose and Destiny of Man

By Richie Temple

Cary, N.C.

There are few more important topics in the Bible than the biblical view of the *nature, purpose, and destiny* of man. Our understanding in regard to many other biblical subjects is directly affected by our beliefs on these key topics. Not surprisingly, they have been the subject of countless theological discussions as well as the cause of seemingly endless controversies throughout the centuries amongst the various branches of Christendom.

The Bible, however, is amazingly clear about these matters if we allow it to speak apart from theological biases. In Psalm 8 David surveys the wonders of God's creation and exclaims:

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet (Psalm 8:3-6).

These verses are an obvious allusion to the biblical account of the creation of man recorded in the Book of Genesis. Apparently, David was not moved when he considered the majesty of God's awesome universe to think that he may have evolved from some lower form of life. Instead, God's wondrous creation turned his mind to God's "invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature" - through which God had created all things, including man, for the *purpose* of God's own glory (Rom. 1:20f; Isaiah 43:7).

The original account of man's creation provides the sure foundation for a proper understanding of man's *purpose* in life and the *nature* of his being. With this biblical understanding also comes the key to unlocking the ultimate *destiny*

of God's people - the people of faith. Let us begin in Genesis 1:26-27:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Though there has long been speculation about the meaning of the phrase "in the image of God", Old Testament scholars generally agree that this is the language of royalty. God created man in his own image in order to endow man with a "god-like" kingship or rulership over the created earth - to be exercised in fellowship with God. This intimate relationship was meant to bring blessing to man and glory to God. The *NIV Study Bible* explains these verses as follows:

God speaks as the Creator-King, announcing his crowning work to the members of his heavenly court ... Man is the climax of God's creative activity, and God has "crowned him with glory and honor" and "made him ruler" over the rest of his creation (Ps. 8:5-8). Since man was created in the image of the divine king, delegated sovereignty (kingship) was bestowed on him.

Victor P. Hamilton adds the following comments in relationship to the fact that much of Genesis 1 is an obvious contrasting of God's true creation order to the mythological creation stories and beliefs of the nations that surrounded Israel:

In ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian society the king, or some other high-ranking official, might be called "the image of God." Such a designation, however, was not applied to the canal digger or to the mason who worked on a ziggurat. Gen. 1 may be using royal language to describe simply "man." In God's eyes all of mankind is royal. All of humanity is related to God, not just the king (*The New Int. Com. of the OT*, p. 135).

Let us note that nowhere does the Bible ever say that man lost this status of being "in the image of God" after his expulsion from the garden of Eden (cf. Gen. 9:6; James 3:9). Yes, creation was "cursed" but the very fact that man was created in the image of God is the basis upon which other

biblical statements are made (e.g., it is the reason for the death penalty being prescribed for murder, Gen. 9:6; cf. James 3:9).

This understanding of man created "in the image of God" has important consequences for our understanding of the *nature* of man as a unity rather than as separable parts. Hamilton continues in his commentary on these verses:

It is clear that v. 26 is not interested in defining what is the image of God in man. The verse simply states the fact, which is repeated in the following verse. Nevertheless, innumerable definitions have been suggested: conscience, the soul, original righteousness, reason, the capacity for fellowship with God ... etc. Most of these definitions are based on subjective inferences rather than objective exegesis. Any approach that focuses on one aspect of man - be that physical, spiritual, or intellectual - to the neglect of the rest of man's constituent features seems doomed to failure. Gen. 1:26 is simply saying that to be human is to bear the image of God. This understanding emphasizes man as a unity. No part of man, no function of man is subordinated to some other, higher part or activity.

The popular notion that man is "a spiritual being housed in a body" is totally contrary to the biblical way of thinking. In the Bible man is pictured not as a three-part or two-part being but as a single unity - a "living being" (Gen. 2:7). When the Bible speaks of man's "spirit, soul and body" (I Thess. 5:23) it is not delineating a three-part being anymore than it is teaching a four-part being when it tells us to love God with all our "heart, soul, mind and strength." This is simply a biblical way of emphasizing the *whole person*, not a method of differentiating parts.

In the Bible salvation has to do with the *whole* man and the *whole* creation (Rom. 8:18f). Man was the crowning achievement of that creation and the biblical doctrine of redemption and salvation has as its goal the restoration and establishment of an even greater "inhabited world to come" (Heb. 2:4). Our final *destiny* is not to be found in a resting-place "beyond the sky." Instead, the biblical hope is for "the universal restoration of all things"- to be fulfilled at Christ's second coming (Acts 3:21 REB, NRSV). It is true that the kingdom of God which we will inherit (I Cor. 15:50) is a "heavenly kingdom" (II Tim. 4:18); however, that is because it

is now "kept in heaven" until it will finally be "revealed in the last time" (I Pet. 1:4-5). At that time God's people will be raised and transformed so that the "perishable" can inherit the "imperishable" and the "mortal" the "immortal" (I Cor. 15:50-57). The letter of II Peter sums up this clear biblical hope for the final *destiny* of man:

But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and new earth, the home of righteousness (II Pet. 3:13).

Though this was first promised to the Old Testament people of God, it continues to be a promise for God's new covenant people as well. Man was created to rule over the earth and in the re-created "world to come" God's people will once again, with Christ, enjoy that rulership free from the sin, frustrations and death of this present evil age. May this hope be the "anchor" of our lives (Heb. 6:19) as we seek in this life to truly live for him.

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Body, Soul, and Spirit: Are We Three-Part Beings?

One verse that is often used to prove that man is a three-part being is I Thessalonians 5:23 which *appears* to do just that:

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (NIV).

But the problem is resolved when it is understood that Paul is speaking out of a biblical Hebraic background not from the point of view of Plato, Aristotle, or the modern age. As the *New Bible Commentary*, p. 1284, states,

Spirit, soul, and body is a way of saying "completely" by reference to three aspects of a human being - life in relationship with God, the human personality, and the body through which one acts and expresses oneself. [See Notes & Quotes for more information on this topic]

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The Hope of Immortality

by Don Robertson

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One of the most important questions facing Christian believers today regards the subject of immortality. The word "immortality" is defined as the quality of living forever; never dying; or having everlasting life. Although the word "immortality" is not found that many times in the Bible, the concept of living forever, never dying, or having everlasting life is set forth many times in the Scriptures. John 3:16 is a very familiar example:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16; Scripture verses are from KJV unless otherwise noted).

Since the Bible obviously has much to say about the subject of immortality we must ask: does the Bible present immortality as something that is *conditional* or does it set it forth as something that is *innate*? The word "conditional" is defined as "containing a condition; depending on something else; qualified; made on certain terms." Many parents make promises to their children such as, "If you graduate from high school, I will give you an automobile." In this promise receiving the automobile is *conditional* on the person graduating from high school. The promise is made on certain terms. It's qualified. It's *not* unconditional.

The word "innate" is contrasted with "conditional." The word "innate" means "inborn; natural; not acquired." It's what you have by reason of birth. That's the difference between something that is conditional and something that is innate, or something that you have within yourself by reason of birth.

So is immortality something we are born with? Are we born immortal? Are we born with a quality of living forever, never dying or having everlasting life? Do we have that by virtue of being a human being? Or, is immortality something that is conditional - something that is not natural to us, something that depends on something else, something that is qualified or is made on certain terms? How does the Bible set forth immortality? Let's turn our Bibles to I John 2:15-17:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever (I John 2:15-17).

Look closely at verse 17 and see if this verse is setting forth an *innate* immortality, something that man is born with. Or, is it setting forth a *conditional* immortality that man can attain if he meets certain conditions or requirements? The word immortality is not there but the expression "abideth for ever" means the same thing. Anything that abides forever is everlasting. Is the immortality that is set forth here something that one has automatically? No. John says, "... he that doeth the will of God *abideth forever*." Well, if all men were to abide forever whether they do the will of God or not, then what John says in that verse is misleading. Because here he says that in order to abide forever, we must *do* something. We must *do the will of God* in order to abide forever.

The Bible teaches that God is immortal but that human beings are mortal, not immortal. Look at Romans chapter one:

Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles (Rom. 1:22-23 NIV).

If immortal means the quality of living forever, never dying or having everlasting life, then mortal is just the opposite of that. Mortal would be not living forever; it would be dying or, being subject to death. Simply put, that which is mortal does not innately possess everlasting life.

The Old Testament View of Man

Let's go to the beginning where God created mankind. I think we can learn something about the nature of man by what is said concerning Adam. Let's look at Genesis chapter three and pick up the story in verse 17. This is just after Adam and Eve committed sin and God is appearing to them and pronouncing a judgment on them as a result of their sin.

And unto Adam he said, "Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, 'thou shalt not eat of it:' cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:17-19).

Notice what God tells Adam is going to happen to him. He is going to return into the ground, "for dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return." The word "thou" (the modern versions would have "you") is referring to Adam as a person. Adam is going to return unto the ground, to the dust. Look further at Genesis 3:

And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them. And the Lord God said, Behold, the man has become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden to till the ground from whence he was taken" (Gen. 3:20-23).

So why did God put Adam out of the garden? To prevent him from putting forth his hand and tasting of the tree of life and eating and living for ever. Would Adam have lived forever without partaking of that tree of life, whatever is involved in that? No, he wouldn't. The way Adam could have lived forever is partaking of that tree of life, whatever is involved in that. God put him out of the garden lest he partake of that tree of life and live forever. Adam wasn't created with the ability to live forever. There was an *opportunity* for him to live forever. If he had been obedient to God, if he had served God, then that tree of life would have been open to him and he could have eaten of it and lived forever. Because of sin, God put him out of the garden so he couldn't eat of that tree and live forever. Living forever was something conditional on his *obedience*, on his *faithfulness* to God. But because of his *unfaithfulness*, he was put out of the

garden so he couldn't partake of that tree. The judgment pronounced on him was that he would return to the dust from which God created him.

Look at Job chapter 4 and verse 17. This is a statement by Eliphaz, one of the friends of Job who had come to comfort Job in his misery. Eliphaz is raising a question here,

*"Shall mortal man be more just than God?
Shall a man be more pure than his Maker?"
(Job. 4:17).*

I think it is obvious that the answer to the question is "No." Man shall not be more just than God and man shall not be more pure than his Maker. Notice how Eliphaz describes man in this verse - "Shall mortal man be more just than God?" Eliphaz had the idea that man is mortal. Man is subject to death. Man is not immortal. We might be thinking, "Well, that is just Eliphaz's opinion that man is mortal." Let's see if Job himself thought that. Look at Job chapter 14:

*"Man that is born of a woman is of few days,
and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a
flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a
shadow, and continueth not" (Job 14:1-2).*

Notice how Job is describing man. Job is saying that man is *not* going to live forever. Man is just going to live a few days and he is going to die. Let's pick it up at verse 10 and read a few verses. Notice how Job describes man whenever he dies:

*But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man
giveth up the ghost, and where is he? As the
waters fail from the sea, and the flood
decayeth and drieth up; So man lieth down,
and riseth not: till the heavens be no more,
they shall not awake, nor be raised out of
their sleep. Oh, that thou wouldest hide me
in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me
secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou
wouldest appoint me a set time, and
remember me? If a man die, shall he live
again? All the days of my appointed time
will I wait, till my change come" (Job 14:10-14).*

That's a tremendous question Job asked: "If a man dies, shall he live again?" You can paraphrase Job's question and put it like this: "If a man dies, is he *really* dead?" I say that he is and Job's question is, if a man dies shall he live again?

The word "again" means "once more." Job's hope was that sometime in the future that he would live again. What would the state of man be between the time he would die and the time he would live again? Notice in verse 12 he says, "So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not *awake* or be raised out of their *sleep*." So that is the state man in between death and resurrection. Job's hope for a future life was not that he would live on and on and not die. Instead, his hope was in the fact that he would live *again* in the resurrection.

The New Testament View of Man

Does the New Testament set forth the same view about man as the Old Testament; that is, that man is mortal and subject to death? Look at James chapter 4 and notice the way James puts it:

Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away (James 4:13-15).

Notice the way James states this: "For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away." The modern versions make it even more plain. Instead of saying, "It is even a vapor," they have, "You are even a vapor." You are a mist or a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Notice it doesn't say your *body* is just a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away; it says *you* are. The King James version has "It is even a vapor ..." but the modern versions have "*You* are ..." You, the person, the personality, are a vapor.

Human beings then are mortal, not immortal. Immortality is something we seek and must put on. We don't have it, but we are seeking for it and we must "put it on." Look at Romans 2:6-7. It's speaking of the time of judgment when God will render to all their due:

Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life (Rom. 2:6-7).

Notice what people are to seek for: glory, honor and immortality. What will God render to us, what will He give us, the ones who are seeking for immortality? Eternal life!! The ones seeking for immortality will get it. You don't seek for something that you already have or already possess. We're seeking for immortality and God is going to render it to us.

Look at I Corinthians 15. Paul tells us we must "put on" immortality:

Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory" (I Cor. 15:51-54).

When will death be swallowed up in victory? When will we gain the victory over death? Only when we *put on* immortality - at the time of Christ's return and the resurrection day. The word "incorruptible" means that it is not subject to decay. The resurrection body will be incorruptible, not subject to decay. The one we have now is mortal, subject to death. The one we will get at Christ's return is immortal, *not* subject to death.

Immortality is something we are *seeking* and must *put on*. We don't have it now. In the light of this we must state that human beings are mortal. There is no such thing as an "immortal soul." Instead, the Hebrew and Greek words sometimes translated "soul" define something that can die. The soul is mortal, the soul can die. Look at Ezekial 18:4 in the King James Version:

Behold all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die (Ezekial 18:4).

God said, "All souls are mine; the soul that sinneth, it shall die." Notice the first sentence in verse 20: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." We

see that two times in Ezekial the scriptures state that the soul can die. Look at James chapter 5:

Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul [i.e., a person] from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins (James 5:20).

When you convert somebody, what do you do? You save a soul, or a person, from death. That's what people are saved from. What about the souls not saved from death? They will die. God says in Ezekial that it shall die. But you can be saved from that death by obeying the gospel.

Only God has Absolute Immortality

Only God has absolute immortality - no beginning and no end of existence and life. Look at Psalm 90:

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God (Psalm 90:1-2).

So before the earth existed, there was a God. After the earth is gone, there will be a God: "from everlasting to everlasting". This is hard for us to comprehend. We're so time oriented and time conscious. We're so conditioned to things having a beginning and coming to an end, that it is hard for us to imagine something that didn't have a beginning and will not have an end. Yet, that is the way the Bible presents God.

I remember several years back when my oldest daughter Terry was about 6 or 7 years old and we were coming back from the church service. Something she heard that day prompted her to ask the question, "Where did God come from?" It surprised me that a child so young would ask that question and so I answered it something like this: "God has always existed; He didn't have a beginning." She didn't reply for a while and I thought she had forgotten about it. Then she spoke out and said, "You know, that is something to think about: God has always existed." That was pushing a six-year old mind to the limit. It can even push *our* minds to the limit. I don't care how much education one has, that can stagger the mind; to try to comprehend something that had *no beginning* and will have *no end*.

Look at Isaiah chapter 57. Here God is speaking through the prophet Isaiah:

For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones (Isaiah 57:15).

Notice especially the first part of that verse. God inhabiteth eternity. He lives in eternity. God is eternal. Look also at I Timothy chapter 6:

I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; that thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall show, Who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord or lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; Whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to Whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen" (I Tim. 6:13-16).

Notice in describing God in verse 16 that Paul states: "Who *only* has immortality." If angels have eternal life and we can receive eternal life through the gospel, why does it say only God has immortality? Because only God has *absolute* immortality - no beginning and no end of existence. Other beings receive life from God. God had no beginning and he will have no ending. Everything else came into existence as a result of God's creative work, including both angelic beings and human beings. God is thus the fountain or source of all life. Look at Psalm 36. Here David is describing something about God:

For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light (Psalm 36:9).

Why would God be called the fountain of life? I think the word "fountain" here is used in the sense of "source." God is the source, or He is the origin of life. Just as a fountain is the source of water, so God is the source of life.

Let's look at some examples of God giving eternal life. Let's start with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus came he came as a man so that he could die for the sins of man. Hebrews 2:9 says,

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man (Heb. 2:9).

Notice in verse 9 that Jesus was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death. Jesus was born as a man so that he might die. Look at verses 14-16:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he [the Lord Jesus] also himself likewise took part of the same [he took part of flesh and blood]; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. And deliver them, who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham (Heb. 2:14-16).

Jesus was born as a man. The nature he possessed was not the nature of angels, composed of spirit, but it was the nature of man, the seed of Abraham. The reason he was made flesh was so that he would be able to die. But God raised Jesus from the dead - never to die again. When Jesus was resurrected, he was resurrected not to mortal human life anymore. He was resurrected to an *immortal* state - never to die again.

Look at Revelation chapter one. Here Jesus is speaking to John when he appeared to him on the Isle of Patmos. This is what he tells John:

"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Rev. 1:18).

Notice the phrase, "I am alive for evermore." Jesus lived as a man and died as a man, but he didn't stay dead. God raised him from the dead and he is alive for evermore. He was resurrected to immortality, never to die again. He is the first one to experience that type of resurrection. That is why Paul refers to

Jesus as "the firstfruits of them that slept" (I Cor. 15:20).

There are many examples of physical resurrection in the Scriptures. There were those whom Jesus raised from the dead during his earthly ministry such as Lazarus and the daughter of Jarius. The apostles also raised people from the dead. Why then does the Bible say that Jesus is the *first* that was raised from the dead (Acts 26:23)? The answer is clear: Jesus was raised to *immortality* - never to die again. All of these others were raised back to mortal life. That's why Lazarus and Dorcas and others are not around today. They were raised back to normal, mortal, physical life and they experienced death again at some later time. But Jesus was raised to immortality, never to die again. That's also what we will experience at our resurrection (I Cor. 15:50-54).

Look at Romans chapter 6:9-10. This is a description of the state the Lord Jesus is in since he experienced that resurrection.

Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God (Rom. 6:9-10).

Why doesn't death have any dominion, reign or rule over Jesus? Because Jesus was raised to immortality and a being that has immortality can never die. Instead, Jesus has everlasting life - he will live forever. Death simply can't touch someone who is immortal.

Immortality: God's Conditional Gift to Mankind

My final point is that eternal life, or immortality, is God's *conditional* gift to mankind. Look at Psalm 21:4. Here David is speaking of the king that would be rejoicing in the Lord:

He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever (Psalm 21:4).

Here is a king that is asking God for life. What kind of life? Eternal life, God is going to give people eternal life. Notice how it is described: "even length of days for ever and ever." This is a good definition of eternal life: Length of days for ever and ever. Notice in the verse, however, that God had to *give*

this to man. Romans 6:23 is a key passage in this regard. It sets forth several important truths:

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:23).

What does sin result in? What are the consequences, or the wages, of sin? Wages is something you earn, something you work for, something that you have coming to you. God is going to pay the wages of sin - which is death. But look at the contrast: "But the gift of God is eternal life." Eternal life is a gift that comes from God. Man doesn't possess it by nature. He isn't born with this eternal life. Man isn't born with immortality. It's a gift from God. But does God give it to everybody? No! Its received only through our Lord Jesus Christ. Only the ones that are in the right relationship with Jesus Christ are going to get it. John tells us this very clearly in his first Letter:

And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life (I John 5:11-12).

Notice that this life is not in some denominational church. It's not in some man-made organization. This eternal life is in God's Son. It is a gift from God, but you must be in right relationship with the Son in order to receive it. Eternal life is a *conditional* gift from God received through believing in his Son. It is not something that is innate or inborn. Instead, only those who "have the Son, have life."

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“Immortality”

According to the *Harper-Collins Bible Dictionary*,

“... Two Greek words express the idea of immortality. One (*athanasia*) is translated literally as deathlessness (I Cor. 15:53); the other (*aphtharsia*) as imperishability (Rom. 2:7) ... As Jesus is pictured in the Gospels he shares the Hebrew notion of resurrection, rather than the notion of an immortal soul ... Immortality for Paul is not the continuing existence of the soul apart from the body, but is rather the new heavenly existence of those who clothed in ‘spiritual bodies,’ share in Jesus’ resurrection in the new age.” [p. “Immortality, p. 451-2].

Endless Torture Unbiblical

by Steve Jones

Jonesboro, GA

Many Christians consider the doctrine of endless torture a non-negotiable tenet. To deny it is to deny sound teaching and to join the ranks of the cults. Many sincere Bible teachers insist we believe in a God who torments the unconverted forever. At the same time, we are told that God does not delight in the death of the wicked, that he is full of tender mercies. Is this the consistent doctrine of Scripture regarding final punishment? Will God, whose name is love (I John 4:7), keep most of mankind alive so that he can perpetually burn them with flames? Certainly, we have a right to ask the question, since Paul tells us to "test all things" (I Thess. 5:21).

We would concur that certain isolated texts may suggest such a punishment for the lost. These passages are very small in number. The general tenor Scripture, on the other hand, seems to suggest something different. Consistently, we read that the wicked will finally die, perish, be cut off, slain, devoured and destroyed.

Old Testament Teaching

One of the great difficulties with the popular view of final punishment or hell is the profound silence of the Old Testament. This is frequently admitted by orthodox believers. Everywhere we find God warning sinners to repent. He threatens judgment for disobedience and carries it out on many occasions. But the idea of endless torture after death is extremely obscure.

God threatened Adam and Eve with death as a punishment for their sin. This He defined, not as an eternity of pain, but as a return to the dust of the earth (Gen. 3:19). Many Bible teachers will point out that God said "in the day you eat of it [the tree of knowledge of good and evil] you shall die" (Gen. 2:17). Orthodoxy reasons that because the pair did not die the same day they sinned, the "death" must be of a different kind. This does not follow. The Hebrews often spoke in an anticipative or *proleptic* sense. That which is certain to happen is spoken of as a present reality. For an example, when Abimelech took Abraham's wife, God said to him, "Behold, you *are* a dead man" (Gen. 20:3). In other

words, death was imminent, though not literally present.

The absence of explicit instructions regarding the punishment due Adam and Eve - and their posterity - is bewildering in light of the common view. *Did God send sinners to hell for thousands of years before He ever disclosed this awful fact?* We wonder how God could have warned Israel in precise detail about plagues, droughts and other punishments without saying a word about the worst punishment of all. Read the penalties for disobedience to the Mosaic Law (Deut. 28:15-68). Where are the warnings of hellfire in a future life?

Not a word came from the lips of Abraham, Isaac or Jacob about an endless hell. Likewise, Moses, Joshua, the Judges of Israel and the Psalmists are silent on the matter. The prophets of Israel and Judah, though they say much of God's wrath, fail to teach anything about torments after death. Jeremiah does mention "the valley of the son of Himmon" (Jer. 7:32), which any Bible dictionary will identify as the *Gehenna* or hell spoken of by Jesus. But in this text, the prophet calls this place "the Valley of *Slaughter*." Anyone can see that "slaughter" is something entirely different than an endless existence in agony.

Isaiah mentions "everlasting burnings" in his prophecy (Isa. 33:14). But, amazingly, he calls this judgment "the *devouring* fire." This contradicts what many Christians teach about hell. Sinners are supposed to writhe in the flames without ever being devoured. But Isaiah denies it. He also says that *no one can dwell in the everlasting burnings*, despite the view that hell is "the eternal abode of sinners."

The many occurrences of the word "hell" in the King James Version of the Old Testament are the result of faulty translating. Modern versions of Scripture have corrected the error. They seldom, if ever, render the Hebrew word *sheol* in this way. Instead, we read such words as "the pit," "the grave" or "death." The same is true of the New Testament word *hades*, which should never have been translated "hell" in the first place. Check any Bible dictionary.

Many times, the prophets of Israel mention fire in connection with divine judgment. But they always present fire as an agent of *destruction*, not

torment in a future life. Zephaniah, for example, said, "In the fire of his jealous wrath, all the earth shall be *consumed*" (Zeph. 1:18). Malachi said, "the day comes, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of Hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch" (Mal. 4:1). He goes on to say that the wicked would be reduced to ashes under the feet of the righteous (v. 2, 3).

The Teaching of Jesus

Jesus spoke of a final judgment in which God would "*destroy* both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). This text is so ruinous to the common view that Bible teachers have assigned a theological meaning to the word "destroy." Many who claim to "take the Bible literally" escape the obvious meaning here by re-defining "destroy" as eternal, conscious separation from God. But the Bible nowhere else uses "destroy" in such a self-contradictory manner.

The word "hell" is translated from the word *Gehenna*, seldom used in the Scripture. Once the sight of idolatrous worship, it was a garbage dump outside Jerusalem where the bodies of executed criminals were cast. Worms fed on the carcasses. The imagery was familiar to the Jews. When Jesus said that the wicked would be destroyed in *Gehenna*, everyone knew what he meant. In Mark 9:48, Jesus speaks of a place where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched." But this does not prove endless torments. The passage is actually a quote from Isaiah 66:24: "And they shall go forth and look on the dead bodies of the men that have rebelled against me; for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh." The fire and worms are feeding on *corpses*, not "never-dying souls."

Jesus does speak of "eternal punishment" in Matthew 25:48. But we would affirm that the destruction of evildoers in wrath qualifies in every way as an eternal punishment. The effects of such a punishment last forever, as long as the eternal life enjoyed by the righteous. The wicked will be extinct, never to rise again. The punishment is eternal.

Some may object that we are playing games with words. But the authors of Scripture often use "eternal" to modify an activity that takes place in

limited time, as long as the *effects* are ongoing. For example, the Bible uses the term "eternal redemption" to signify a once-for-all event with ongoing *effects*. Jesus Christ is not eternally redeeming his people. He did that in time, on the cross. But the effects of his redemption stretch into eternity.

Jesus often informed his hearers that unbelievers will *perish* in the judgment (Luke 13:1-5; John 3:16) and not see life (John 3:36). They would be gathered and burned up, as men burn withered sticks (John 15:6). The meanings of these words were evident to the common people of his day.

Many will appeal to the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16 as proof of eternal torment. But the story is admitted on all hands as non-literal in many respects. Few believe that the story is an accurate account of what goes on after death. The Hebrew imagery of the dead carrying on conversations is not unique (Isaiah 14:3-10). Furthermore, the story does not deal with the final punishment at all. It is a pre-resurrection account (verses 27-28) and does not address the duration of punishment after the Judgment Day.

Apostolic Teaching

The apostles taught the same view. Read the evangelistic sermons in the Book of Acts and see if they speak a word about eternal torments. Peter said, "every soul that does not listen to that prophet [Jesus] shall be *destroyed* from the people" (Acts 3:23). Destruction, not endless suffering, is the end of God's Judgment.

The epistles take up the same idea. Paul, who "did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable," (Acts 20:20) warns no one about eternal torment. On the contrary, he writes of those whose "end is *destruction*" (Phil. 3:10) and of the ungodly who will face "eternal *destruction*" at the coming of the Lord (2 Thess. 1:8-9). "The wages of sin," says Paul, "is *death*" (Rom. 6:23). He does not tell his readers, "the wages of sin is to burn in hell *without* dying." Yet, that is the very thing orthodoxy teaches. Again, the apostle says that "if you live according to the flesh, you will *die*" (Rom. 8:13). If eternal torment is true, why would he cloak the doctrine in ambiguity - especially considering the gravity of the matter?

Peter also teaches the destruction of the wicked on Judgment Day. He likens their fate unto the incineration of Sodom and Gomorrah (2 Pet. 2:6-7). James speaks of the unrighteous rich who will be led off to slaughter and consumed by their wealth (James 5:1-5). In Revelation 14:10-11, we read that God torments those who worship the beast, adding "the smoke of their torments goes up forever and ever." But this is language borrowed from the *destruction* of Edom (Isa. 34:10), it has nothing to do with misery in a future life. There is nothing in the text that demands such a thing. The testimony of both the testaments is conclusive: the wicked will most surely perish.

"The Lord preserves all who love him; but all the wicked will he destroy" (Psa. 145:20).

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"Eternal Punishment"

The notion of eternal punishment is often equated in Christian understanding as everlasting torment for the ungodly in hell. That the Bible teaches of a final judgment and destruction of the ungodly in hell there can be no doubt. Nor would any person of sound intelligence say that this is not something to be feared and avoided at all costs. However, does the NT actually teach *everlasting* torment? As usual, much of the problem has to do with a wrong understanding of biblical language. Consider the following quotations from renowned Bible scholars:

" 'Eternal destruction' (II Thess. 1:9) is the alternative to God's gift to believers - 'eternal life' (cf. Rom. 2:7; 5:21; 6:22, 23; Gal. 6:8). **If 'eternal life' is the life of the age to come, the resurrection age, 'eternal destruction' is the destruction of the age to come, with a strong implication of finality**" (F.F. Bruce, *Word Biblical Commentary, I & II Thessalonians*, p. 152).

"Matt. 25:46 raises the question of eternal punishment. The passage has often been cited in support of the doctrine of *endless* torment. But it may be questioned whether it means more than the *finality* of judgment. The term eternal has both qualitative and quantitative overtones ... eternal fire does not necessarily imply that those concerned go on being judged or continue to be consumed. If the metaphor of fire is to be pressed at all, it would imply that **the fire continues to burn but that what is consumed once is consumed for good**" [Colin Brown, *NIDNTT*, Vol. 3, p. 99].

Notes & Quotes on the Bible

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

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 nor 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 reclothing 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, James 1:21, 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*, Eerdmanns, 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.”

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“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).”

Richie Temple

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