

Immortality —A Biblical Re-Examination— (With a Bright Outlook)

TRADITION

Perhaps nothing holds us so tightly as that which we have always heard and which has rarely or never been challenged. If our fathers and their mothers for generations before them have held something to be true, we often feel that the weight of ages is bound to be in favor of their position. However, error has traditions behind it as much as truth does; but only error frowns when we step forward to question.

Christians for many centuries (although not always) have believed that man possesses an immortal soul—that when we die something conscious continues to exist. We challenge that concept—and challenge it from the only true source of Christian doctrine: the Bible.

NO “IMMORTAL SOUL” IN BIBLE

Frequently it startles Christians and Jews alike to find that the term “immortal soul” never occurs in the Bible. Below is reprinted a section from *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. This book lists *every word* in the common version of the Bible. You may well be startled also to see what a *rare* word immortal is:

immortal

I Ti 1:17 Now unto the King eternal, *i'*, *862

immortality

Ro 2: 7 glory and honour and *i'*, eternal *861
I Cor 5:53 and this mortal must put on *i'* 110
I Cor 5:54 this mortal shall have put on *i'* "
I Ti 6:16 Who only hath *i'*, dwelling in the "
2Ti 1:10 hath brought life and *i'* to light †861

The word is translated from three Greek words which Scripturally are used almost interchangeable: #110, ATHANASIA = deathlessness; #861, APHTHARSIA = incorruptibility; and #862, APHTHARTOS = decaying.

Note their uses: I Timothy 6:16 shows that even the angels are not immortal (deathless). But does this mean that angels die? No! It does not mean they die. It means they *can* die—but they don't. In the Bible “mortal” does not mean that death is a *necessity*; it only means that it is a *possibility*. “Immortal” in the Bible does *not* mean “not dying.” It means that death is an *absolute*

impossibility because the being who is immortal has life “*in himself*.” (John 5:26) Jesus well understood the difference between *life* (mortal life which can last forever) and *immortality* (which also lasts forever—but for a different reason). Jesus is the one who has brought to light the difference between the two (life and immortality). See II Timothy 1:10.

SOULS CAN AND DO DIE

The Bible clearly shows that souls die: “The soul that sinneth it shall die.” (Ezekiel 18:4) Paul repeats the *idea* in Romans 6:23: “The wages of sin is death.” All other texts on the subject throughout the Bible corroborate this one basic thought: it is the soul that dies when we die.

WHAT DEATH IS

The formula for a human soul is first clearly stated by Moses in Genesis 2:7: “The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man BECAME a LIVING SOUL. God made man’s body and imparted the breath or power of life; and the UNION OF THE TWO BECAME a living soul. It is a very simple concept. God did not *give* man a soul. Man *IS* a soul. The soul is an animated (breathing) body. A *dead soul* is man when the breath of life stops. (Psalm 104:29) Because of this, *consciousness* stops when we die. The Scriptures clearly teach this: man “returneth to his earth; in that very day his *thoughts perish*.” (Psalm 146:4) “In death there is no *remembrance* of thee.” (Psalm 6:5) “The living know that they shall die, but the dead *know not anything*.” (Ecclesiastes 9:5)

DEATH (NOT TORTURE) IS PUNISHMENT

God made His creatures mortal so that *if* they disobeyed He could take away their lives. This was so ultimately logical. God does not want disobedience in the universe. To eliminate it, He simply reserves the right to take life away from those who misuse it. If He had made His creatures immortal, He would not have had that option. He clearly stated this information to our first parent (Genesis 2:17): “Thou shalt surely die.” Adam was not promised heaven for obedience; he was not promised torture for disobedience. He was promised everlasting (but mortal) life on a beautiful earth if he remained obedient. He was promised death (extinction—removal of life) for disobedience. His disobedience resulted in his death—and he passed death and disobedience on to all of us as our inheritance. We all die “in Adam” (I Corinthians 15:22).

THE FIRST LIE

Genesis 3:4 records the first lie. It was Satan’s. He called God a liar. He claimed we will not die. Quite unfortunately most of mankind ever since have really

believed Satan. Most of mankind truly believe that we do “not surely die”—that something keeps right on living. That, however, is *not* what God says.

ONE ERROR LED TO ANOTHER

The concept of our having immortal souls has led to innumerable errors of faith. After all, if we believe that we continue conscious existence after death, we must then strive to explain *where* we exist. Because of this the concept of eternal torture in hell was invented (erroneously); the thought that Christians go immediately to heaven at death was invented (erroneously); and ideas like reincarnation, limbo, and purgatory were invented (erroneously).

RESURRECTION—THE WAY OUT OF THE PROBLEM

God well knew that mankind would learn from experience with dying and death. He knew we would, through experience, decide that obedience and life are better than disobedience and dying. He knew we would like the opportunity to do things over again—better. He, therefore, graciously arranged that the death of Jesus would pay for the original sin which brought condemnation to the race. He arranged for a time when He would establish a kingdom on earth where His will would be done as it is done in heaven. (Matthew 6:10) Because men have died, however, it is necessary that they be brought back to life to learn from and enjoy the blessings of that Kingdom. Therefore, He arranged for a RESURRECTION of the DEAD (not of departed souls)—*both* of the JUST and the UNJUST. (Acts 24:15) Yes, the resurrection is for everyone. God is “the savior of all men, especially of those that believe.” (I Timothy 4:10; I John 2:2) This is God’s answer to death: the RESURRECTION. If we had immortal souls we would not *need* a resurrection. We would never die. But we do not have immortal souls; we *do* die. We need a resurrection. Notice, however, from the text above that there is a *special salvation* for believers.

TWO SALVATIONS

We notice from Romans 2:7 and I Corinthians 15:53, 54 that SOME will actually eventually obtain immortality. What a thought! Some will, in the resurrection, get what only God originally had: immortality—death-proofness. God is willing to give this as a reward in the resurrection to those who, by being faithful followers of Jesus, have so proven their worth, that God can trust them with immortality, knowing that they will forever be faithful and obedient to Him. This, in part, will be the Christian’s reward for a life of self-sacrifice. This is called the FIRST RESURRECTION (Revelation 20:6). These will experience a resurrection to a new nature. They will no longer be men (I John 3:2). They will have the privilege of being (with Jesus) the government of the Kingdom for which we so often pray. (Revelation 5:10; Isaiah 9:6, 7) the remainder of mankind (the billions who have lived) will be raised as men. They will be mortal, but they will not

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die. (Revelation 21:4) They will learn righteousness and obedience during the Kingdom and will live happily ever after on a perfected earth. The earth is the Lord's footstool (Isaiah 66:1), and He will make it glorious (Isaiah 60:13). See also Isaiah 45:18; Isaiah 65:17-25; Isaiah 11:1-9; Isaiah 35:10.

TEXTS NOT COVERED

Some may immediately think of scriptures (like I Samuel 28) which on the surface seem to imply immortality of the soul. With sufficient space all such objections can be harmoniously and Scripturally answered. If you have found this summary intriguing, you may wish to study the subject *completely*. A hardbound book entitled THE ATONEMENT BETWEEN GOD AND MAN is available to you at our printing and mailing cost. This book covers this topic and other basic Christian doctrines in great detail. We will mail it to you if you request it from us. Please go to our **Available Literature** link.