

## **Reasons Conditional Immortality is Scriptural And the Christian form of Plato’s “immortal soul” theory isn’t**

This short article is entirely too brief to bring out all of the Scripture passages to back up its title. In addition, we have omitted the heavy weight of argument which could be put forth from leading Bible scholars and teachers who reject the pagan Persian/Egyptian/Greek concepts of an immortal soul theory in favor of pure Biblical teachings. For those of you reading this article and are interested in further study we recommend the reading and study of the many articles located on this Web site that speak on this topic. There are also many other Web sites on the World Wide Web (Internet) that have much to say on this topic. We wholeheartedly encourage you to investigate further the history of how this pagan concept crept into the beliefs of Christianity and became the element that created many errors in Christian doctrine.

An important element of history that should be considered is the idea man was created with an immortal “soul” inhabiting one’s body. This is an ancient concept from paganism introduced into Christianity in the third century and systemized by Augustine in the fifth century. It is a doctrine or teaching completely unknown in the Christian Scriptures, and stands as an ingeniously sustained, **but formidably contested**, philosophical opinion or theory put forth, erroneously, as a truth of Divine Revelation. However, and this must be stated, that when arguments are put forth for the natural immortality of the “soul” they are rarely, if ever, derived from Scriptures; and, when proof is looked for in Scriptures, pre-conceived ideas are read into the verses and passages used — wholly taken out of their context.

Another fact of history is that this immortal soul theory cannot be found in the writings of the first centuries of Christianity. Although one can find it mentioned by Tertullian in the late third century, he only made reference to it in connection with the opinion of Plato, and did not put it forth as belonging to the teachings of Christ or His Apostles — he plainly admitted it came from Plato! It was through Origen, in the early fourth century, that the immortal soul theory began to take a foothold in Christian teachings. Origen wrote against the eternal punishment model of unsaved man in a hell of fire as taught by Tertullian. He put the punishment as a means of purging sin from one’s immortal soul for entrance into Heaven. Thus the seed was sown for the later developed “purgatory” doctrine of the Latin Church. This is only one of the many errors that developed over time from the unbiblical doctrine of an immortal soul inhabiting the body of man.

We would be remiss if we did not mention that this immortal soul doctrine removes from the Bible the meanings of the words death, destroy, destruction, perish, etc., and finds in them just the opposite of what they originally meant. The Biblical phrase, “The wages of sin is death”, takes on a completely different meaning to those believing in the immortal soul doctrine: it, to them, does not mean death, but instead, “a living death in hell”. If death is the extinction of life, how can it still be called life? How can five or six of the strongest Greek words depicting the extinction of life possibly mean the “maintaining of an everlasting but miserable existence in the fires of hell”? Can one get blood out of a turnip? One might as well try.

An Anglican theologian of the nineteenth century, speaking against the immortal belief of Christianity, brings up the word death: “It will not be denied that, in its primary

meaning, death is a word that conveys a single meaning. It means the conclusion of some existence; it may be an existence integral or partial, but it seems that always something must conclude. It means no less than that one thing, and no more. But when we examine the peculiar process to which the word is submitted in connection with eschatology, we seem to find not only that the old idea of the word gives place to something new, but that an old idea which was single is succeeded by a new idea which is double. When the souls of the wicked are declared to have destruction or death for their doom, the meaning, as is alleged, is firstly that they will survive, secondly that they will survive forever, and thirdly, that they will survive under a double condition: the one, that of continued persistence in wickedness, and, the other that of a co-extensive, and also never-ending immersion in suffering. There appears to be presented here a good deal of difficulty.” When speaking on Matthew 10:28, he says: “Other words, commonly signifying the termination of an existence, are also employed in this connection; as, for example, when we are enjoined to ‘fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell’ [Gehenna]. This double destruction is placed in contrast with a single destruction, that of the body, which is unquestionably absolute, and which therefore must (so it may be argued) have the same meaning.” (Gladstone, *Studies Subsidiary to the Works of Bishop Butler*, Macmillan and Co., NY, 1896, page 215.)

It is important that one reads the article entitled “A Preliminary Study on the Biblical Meaning of Soul” found in this same “Article” page on this Web site. Consideration given to it will answer, biblically, the question “Do you have a Soul?” In answering that question you will get a good background on why the immortal soul theory is not a Christian teaching but is simply a pagan viewpoint.

Thus said, we now proceed to list the reasons why we reject the immortal soul belief of various Church Organizations and turn to the Conditional Immortality taught us in the Holy Scriptures — the Bible.

The words “life” and “death” have a very specific meaning in every known language on earth. Life means existence and death means just the opposite — non-existence. These two little words are used with no further explanation given for the simple reason that their meaning was established and well-known since the beginning of recorded history.

Our Lord, Jesus, speaking of himself, said, “Whosoever lives and believes in me shall NEVER DIE” (John. 11:26). In this passage he implies that those not believing in him SHALL DIE. What Jesus implies of unbelievers the Apostle Paul affirms: “If you live according to the flesh, you SHALL DIE” (Rom. 8:113).

There are many more passages wherein the term “death” is used for future punishment. We thusly read of Jesus saying, “If a man keeps my words, he shall never see death” (John 8:51). Paul affirms that the works of sin at the end is death — “For the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:20:23). James agrees and declares that “sin, when finished, brings forth death,” but “whoever turns a sinner away from his error will save him from death and cover many sins” (James 1:5, 5:20). And John, also speaking of the destiny of sinners after dying in this earthly life, shall face “the second death” (Rev. 20:14).

In these few passages of Scripture death is described as the destiny of sinners after the resurrection (Rev. 20:14), and it should be remarked that there is not a single passage in the whole of the Bible that shows death has any other meaning than the loss of existence. In saying this we do not deny that the term can have a figurative sense, but that the figurative sense always, likewise, encompasses a loss of whatever it addresses. For example, Paul tells us to consider ourselves “dead to sin” (Rom. 6:11).

There is another important description we need to discuss concerning the loss of a future life. In 2 Timothy 1:10 there is mention made by Paul that “Our Savior, Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”, gives us the hope of an everlasting life. It was our Lord’s resurrection to life that brought to light “life” — a life that is endless, an immortal life. If immortality is something that man already has, being supposedly born with an immortal soul, how is it that it is never spoken of or even implied in the Bible? How is it that the Apostle Paul, taught by Christ himself (Gal. 1:11–12), tells us that immortality is to be sought (Rom. 2:7)? Why seek something one already has? (See 1 Cor. 15:53–54.) Was Paul misleading us when he said that out Lord, “God...who alone is immortal...” (I Tim. 6:16)? I think not! The uniform revelation given us in the New Testament is that “eternal life” will be the exclusive possession of believers only, and that unbelievers will certainly not obtain it: “The one believing in the Son has life eternal; but the one disobeying the Son will not see life...” (John 3:36). What a promise, and what a warning! Is that not clear?

Life, a thing promised to believers only, and a thing denied to unbelievers. Our question revolves, at this point, as to the proper and natural sense of the word “life.” The Greek term is “*zoe*”, translated “life.” All scholars, of all religious and non-religious backgrounds, in every language of the world understands and agrees that life means to exist or existence.

However, sad to say, the translators of the New Testament have translated two different Greek terms with our English word “life.” Those two Greek terms are (*ζωή*) “*zoe*” and (*ψυχή*) “*psuche*.” *Zoe* is translated life 133 times, and once as lifetime in the KJV of the New Testament. *Psuche* is translated life 34 times and as lives 5 times in the KJV; the rest of its occurrences are translated as soul (39 times) and souls (20 times).

This should be a concern to all Christians of whatever denominational body they affiliate with. Why do I say that? Simply because it takes away the meaning of the passages where “*psuche*” is used. This is one of the reasons why I encourage everyone reading this article to also read the article on the Biblical meaning of “soul”. For example let us translate Genesis 2:7 using the English word life in place of the Greek *psuche*, which is synonymous with the Hebrew *nephesh* in this verse; and, by the way, is also synonymous with the Latin *anima*.

“And 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 LIFE**.”

Sort of ridiculous, isn’t it! Man became a **living BEING**, which, while incorporating life, actually means the whole make-up of man in God’s image. Image means likeness, and that has to do with character, intelligence and emotions — which is the work of the spirit in man. It is much more than animal life, which “*zoe*” (life) represents. James 4:14 says, “What is your life (*zoe*)?” And then he defines what life is: “For you are a vapor that appears for a little while and indeed thereafter disappearing” (literal Greek rendering).

One thing that God has revealed to us through the words of Moses is certain, specifically, that in all the verses and passages using the word “zoe” (see the LXX), it can only mean “animal life,” such as all living creatures share with man. This life all creation loses upon death, and shall be lost the second time by unbelieving man in the hereafter. This life is common to believers and unbelievers alike. It is life that both value and seek to prolong. However, the “psuche” is the life that believers are willing to lose for the sake of Christ, and which unbelievers are unwilling to lose for Christ’s sake. It is this life that Jesus warns unbelievers that they shall lose after being judged — i.e., they shall cease to be living “psuches/souls”. That is their “second death” as spoken of in Revelation 20:14. The writer of the book of Hebrews tells us in 9:27 that “...it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” The Apostle Paul tells us that God “commands all people everywhere to repent”...“because He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man (Christ Jesus) whom He designated...” (Acts 17:30–31). We should always remember that “the wages of sin is DEATH,” not an eternity of suffering in the “Lake of Fire.”

Immortality is never spoken of as being a possession of man. But it is spoken of as something that man is to seek. It is an immortal life (zoe) often referred to as an “eternal life” believers in Christ Jesus are to be given when resurrected from the dead at His return, and no sooner — something unbelievers do not receive.

There are many terms used in the New Testament books that are very significant to the destiny of unbelievers. One of the most common used is the Greek noun “apoleia” ( $\alpha\pi\omega\lambda\varepsilon\iota\alpha$ ), translated by our English term “destruction.” Jesus used it when he said “broad is the way (road) that leads to destruction” (Apoleia: Mt. 7:13). The Apostle Paul speaks of those going that “way” with the statement that they are as “vessels of wrath fitted for destruction” (apoleia: Rom. 9:22). In the Greek language used in the Bible there is no stronger word indicating the complete loss of existence. Schleusner, in his Lexicon, tells us that the meaning of the term “apoleia” is none other than “the destruction of anything so that it ceases to exist.” While he held to the immortal soul theory, he had no choice but to be very honest and give the term its proper meaning. When our Lord, according to Matthew, spoke of the destruction of those on the broad road, he literally said that at judgment they will cease to exist. It can be read no other way.

Another Greek term is the verb “apollumi” — “to destroy utterly.” It is used five times in the Gospel of Matthew: 1) Herod’s attempt to destroy the being or soul of Jesus when he was a small child; 2) the Pharisees plot to destroy Jesus; 3) In the parable of the Lord of the vineyard ordering the unfaithful workers to be destroyed; 4) the parable of the King ordering the slayers of his servants to be destroyed; and 5) Jesus declaring that God can “destroy both body and being (soul) in Gehenna”. (See Mt. 2:1–23, 12:14, 21:41, 22:7 and 10:28.)

This same term is used seven times in the Gospel of Luke: 1) To destroy all creation in Noah’s flood other than those saved in the Ark; 2) the attempts of the enemies of Jesus to destroy him; 3–6) The order to destroy unfaithful men; and 7) The evil spirits confronted by Jesus who were filled with terror that he should destroy them before the time they expected to be destroyed. (See Luke 6:9, 9:56, 17:27 and 29, 19:47, 20:16, and 4:34.)

In ten of these 12 instances it speaks of the loss of existence in the present. In the other two instances it speaks of the loss of existence in the hereafter. As it is appointed for all men to die once on this earth, the last two instances refer to the loss of existence the second time — after Judgment Day. As the Apostle Paul says, speaking of those “not knowing God and to the ones not obeying the Gospel of the Lord of us, Jesus, who will **pay the penalty, eternal destruction**...when he comes...” (2 Thess. 2:9 — Greek literal translation). Their destruction, the loss of life, will last forever — a capital punishment.

### **The Teaching of Paul the Apostle.**

In his letters he speaks of or alludes to the destiny of those who do not know God or do not obey the Gospel of Christ Jesus some twenty-five times. He said that he had “**not hesitated to declare unto you (us) all the counsel of God**” (Acts 20:27). Thusly, his speaking about the destiny of unbelieving and disobedient men is very much a part of the Gospel of Christ Jesus.

Not once does he speak of anyone after their earthly death going to a “hell” to suffer endlessly in fire, nor of going to Heaven. Not once does he speak of anyone’s “soul” being purged of the stain of sin to prepare it for Heaven. Not once does he speak of there being a “hell of fire” in existence. Not once does he mention or make use of the word “torment” and/or of “torture” of ungodly men in a hell for all eternity. Not once does he mention or even hint that ungodly men shall live or exist forever under any circumstance. None of these things are true — otherwise he would have proclaimed that as part of the whole counsel of God.

However, Paul did not hesitate to declare in his many letters the destiny of the ungodly. Every passage wherein he speaks of the end of the ungodly he teaches us of their utter destruction or loss of existence as their punishment given on Judgment Day. Eight times he speaks of them as perishing. Seven times he uses the word **death, the loss of life**, as their destiny. Nine times they are said to be destroyed, once as being devoured by fire, and once as being burned up. It cannot be denied that Paul taught the utter destruction, perishing, death or elimination of any future life for those who did not know God or did not obey the Gospel of Christ Jesus.

While Paul held nothing back of Christ’s Gospel, he did hold back, hesitated or shunned any teaching concerning eternal torment or suffering of the ungodly or unsaved humanity. His teaching on the topic of immortality concerns on those individuals that believed and obeyed the Gospel of Christ Jesus. Seeing as how immortality means **not subject to death**, it is an everlasting life — a life not available to unsaved mankind.

### **Conditional Immortality is Scriptural.**

If we had to only give one example we would point to Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross. In the Old Covenant the wages of sin was paid for by the blood of an animal slain on the altar. The shedding of blood was the death of the animal — typically an unblemished lamb. The lesson was the forfeiture of life, for “the life is in the blood” (Lev. 17:11), and, as stated in the letter to the Hebrews, “...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness”... of sin (Heb. 9:22). When Jesus was “made a sin-offering for us,” He “tasted death for every man.” Jesus met the requirement of the law of God for the atonement of sin, not by torment or suffering, but by pouring out his whole being

(soul/life) unto death. It would be very inconsistent to believe that if the sinner rejects Christ's death on his behalf that he must, instead of death, suffer eternally in a hell of fire.

Conditional Immortality is Scriptural because it is in harmony with God's plan of salvation with all of its conditions. Grace itself is conditional. So too is forgiveness, sanctification, conversion, the glory, the kingdom, the inheritance, etc. — all are conditioned on believing and obeying to Gospel of Christ Jesus. How can anyone who is a "heir of the grace of life" not see that this "grace that is to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ" is also conditional? (See 1 Pet. 3:7, 1:13, Col. 3:4.)

**Hell.** It is a common teaching in most of the denominations of Christianity that at death one immediately goes to either Heaven or Hell. We will boldly, and with no hesitation, declare that these teachings are something that is never taught in any passage of the Bible, period.

Every human being that has died has gone to Hades, the place of the dead. Hades is not hell, but the corporate place of the dead. It will itself, along with death, be cast into the Lake of Fire which is the only place that could be considered a "hell", and will be the place wherein all beings whose names were not found written in God's "Book of Life" will be cast or thrown into to suffer their "second death."

While Jesus used the expression, "cast into Gehenna", we find that it can be reconciled and referenced to the "Lake of Fire" where the unsaved will be "cast" after being judged on the last day. Both of these expressions depict the complete burning up of whatever is cast into them. One should be aware that there is no specific Greek term for our English word "hell" found in the Old or New Testaments. Hades (ᾁιδως) is a Greek term that is synonymous with the Hebrew term "sheol," which is the term for the "grave"; it means "an unseen place" to put it in plain words, a grave in the depths of the earth: it should not be thought of or translated "hell." Gehenna is a name of a valley on the southwest side of Jerusalem that, in Jesus' day was equivalent to a modern day garbage or refuse dump: fire and maggots destroyed what was cast into it — it was not the place of the living. It could and is translated in many versions of the Bible as "hell" seeing as how it performed the same thing as does the Lake of Fire in the Book of Revelation depicts it. Jesus used this term eleven times, and James used it once. Both of them used it to refer to the destiny of unbelieving or disobedient man after the final judgment: and Judgment Day remains in the future; and God's court will not be opened until Jesus raises all those who have ever died — both the good and the bad — to either immortal life or judgment.

**Heaven.** Any talk of the redeemed in the hereafter must be forwarded with an honest and frank admission that the Scriptures don't tell us much of what awaits us in that "better, that is, heavenly country" (Heb. 11:16). Paul tells us in an incident he records that a man was once "...caught up to Paradise. He heard inexpressible words, which it is not permissible for a man to speak" (2 Cor. 12:2–4). In another place he states: "...as it has been written: 'No eye has seen, nor ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him'" (1 Cor. 2:9). But what about Jesus?

Jesus once prayed, saying: "Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (John 17:5). Only once did Jesus seem ready to speak and reveal things about heaven. After spending his last supper with his apostles, he said to them: "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. There

are many rooms in my Father's house; otherwise, I would have told you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may also be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going" (John 14:1–4). If Jesus would not have been interrupted by Thomas, and then Philip, maybe he would have said more; but their questions required him to respond. Thusly we have no idea what Jesus may have had in mind to reveal about heaven.

Seeing what was just said we are limited to the very few places which reveal small bits of information as to the topic of heaven. We are not of the mind of materialistic millennialists such as the Watchtower Society, the Armstrong empire and its Reformed Church of God. Nor of pre and post-millennialists generally. We refuse to go beyond that which is revealed in the Scriptures.

Isaiah informs us that God will "create new heavens and new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered, nor called to mind" (Isa. 65:17). Peter, most likely alluding to Isaiah, plainly states that the heavens which we now see shall pass away with a great noise, that the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works therein shall be burned up...But according to His promise we look for a new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness. (See 2 Pet. 3:10–13, and also Rev. 20:11 where it states that the earth and the heavens will be no more; which is also stated in Rev. 21:1, which adds that even the seas will be no more.) When shall this be? We answer plainly: On Judgment Day!

Chapter Eleven in the Book of Hebrews shows us that there is presently no one in Heaven other than Enoch (and Jesus, we must say). All those who died in faith, both in the Old and New Testament, and up to the present, have to wait until Jesus returns to resurrect us from the grave in order to receive the reward for our faith (Read it!).

When King Solomon dedicated the Jerusalem Temple he asked, "Will God indeed dwell on earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee, much less this house that I have built" (1 Kings 8:27). Russell Boatman, in his book, Beyond Death, page 112, asks the following question: "Is God to somehow shrink Himself, or is the earth somehow to become so much more expansive that God will see fit to move His habitation from the realms of glory to this earth?"

To talk positive, we are specifically told that in the new creation death and the grave (hades) will be no more; they will have been destroyed forever in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:14). God himself will dwell with His redeemed people, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; death shall be no more. There will be no mourning, no crying, no pain any more. All these things will have been done away with. The wicked, those who do evil, and those who do not obey the Gospel of Christ Jesus will die the second death and be no more (See Rev. 21:2–8).

Knowing what Christ Jesus and his Apostles revealed to us about the destiny of man, what type of persons ought we to be in light of what is written? There is this dire and sobering warning we should take to heart: (Rev. 22:11)

"He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still.  
He that is filthy, let him be filthy still.  
He that is righteous, let him do righteousness still.  
He that is holy, let him be made holy still."

The immortal soul doctrine taught in most Churches today is the most noxious seed ever sown in Christendom. It has led to numerous errors that lead multitudes to travel on the broad road that leads to destruction. Conditional Immortality is what the Scriptures teach us, and one that is in complete harmony with everything else taught in God's Word to us.

There may be a big surprise awaiting us on the day of resurrection: there may be present some people we never expected to enter heaven, and then there may be some we expected to be there that are absent. The road is straight and the gate narrow for believers, and few are on it compared to the broad road with many on it (See Mt. 7:13–14).

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While we have tried not to be tedious, and have shunned speculation, we encourage the reader to investigate what is said with the goal of growing in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Christ of God.

We encourage you to read some articles on this Web site that are intended to make one think. Everyone should have their Bible opened and check to see if what is said in the articles is not taken out of context. All are encouraged to let us know what they have learned — all to the praise and glory of God.

On the “Article” page, please read the following:

1. A Preliminary Study on the Meaning of “Soul”  
Do you have a SOUL – find out.
2. A Preliminary Study of the Greek Words Xilias and Xilioi  
A Thousand years? Or Thousands of years? — Find out.
3. Natural Immortality  
Are you born with an immortal soul? — Find out
4. Jesus’ Promise to The Dying Thief  
“Concerning Paradise”
5. Let’s Ask The New Testament About The Spirit In Us

On the “C. Dickinson Article” page, please read the following:

1. Immortality
2. Immortality? Not Yet!
3. Hell: What is it?
4. Myths About Hell
5. Paradise
6. The First Resurrection
7. Your Adversary, The Devil
8. The Millennial Syndrome

And many other interesting articles. All articles on this page are 3–5 pages long.

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