

## The Simple Truth of Immortality

Kenneth Fortier

It has been said that Tradition and Philosophy is very often much more captivating than the plain and simple truth found in the Bible. This is demonstrated at almost all funerals where the one officiating speaks eloquently about how the deceased is now more alive than when living on earth. It is said of the deceased that they are now in Heaven looking down at their own funeral scene while in the company of angels. Of course, that only reflects on those who are carried up into Heaven; the others who went down instead of up are far and few in between, at least that is how it seems at funeral services. I have yet to attend a funeral where it is insinuated, much less said, that the deceased is on the way to Hell.

In spite of assertions from evangelists, of almost all denominations of Christianity, that a person has an “immortal soul” and must choose where it will spend eternity, this doctrine (teaching) is not to be found anywhere in the Bible. This immortal soul doctrine originated from paganism, was propagated by Plato, and as time passed it permeated the Greek speaking world by the time Jesus appeared on the scene. The first Christian writer this pagan theory appeared in was that of Athenagoras (died 186 AD). His work was followed by Minucius Felix, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Cyprian, Ambrose, Chrysostom, and finally Augustine who completed its transformation into the Dogmas of most churches of his time.

However, none of the afore mentioned writers credited that teaching as being taken from the Scriptures. In fact, they honestly admitted that it came from the writings of Plato. It was mainly Augustine’s writings that made Plato’s theory a part of Christian theology. His critics, and apparently there were many, objected by saying “that no body that can suffer pain can escape death.” When Augustine responded to this objection he didn’t seek out Scriptures to back his theology up, rather, he was forced to turn to Plato’s theory for an answer. Scripture doesn’t deal with such an objection, but Plato’s philosophical reasoning had, so Augustine put on a philosopher’s robe to respond. Because Augustine assumed a soul to be immortal he concludes that an unbeliever’s soul could never die. His greatest work, *The City of God, Book 21*, deals with what was just said.

On the Other hand, the earliest writers, Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Ignatius, The Didache, The shepherd of Hermas, Polycarp, Theophilus of Antioch, Irenaeus, Arnobius, Lactantius, and Nemesius of the fifth century, all denied the pagan teaching of an immortal soul in man. Then there were those few writers who are not conclusive on this pagan theory: Justin Martyr, Tatian, Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius and Jerome.

One can not forget the writers who propagated various forms of universalism. Starting with Origen in the middle of the third century (250), he was followed by Gregory Thaumaturgus (270), Pamphilus (309), Theognostus (310), Eusebius of Caesarea (340), Titus of Bostra (370), Diodorus of Tarsus (390), Didymus of Alexandria (395), Gregory of Nyssa (397), and Theodore of Mopsuestia (428). Note: none of these lists are complete as they are just the most well-known of the early writers up to the fifth century.

Let’s look at the record of man’s creation: “*And God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man **became** a living*

soul” (Gen. 2:7). This Scripture record does **not** say “And God put into man an immortal soul!” — that is what is taught from the pagan idea of an immortal soul in man. But the record is clear: **Man — the whole person — is a soul.** There is **not** a single word in the whole of the Bible about God putting a “soul” in man. You will search in vain to find that type of teaching.

The Hebrew word translated “soul” in Genesis 2:7 is “*nephesh* .” It is not the first occurrence of the term, for it first appears in Genesis 1:20, 21 and 24. “*And God said, Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures ( nephesh ), and let birds fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created the great sea-monsters, and every living creature ( nephesh ) that moveth, wherewith the waters swarmed, after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind: and God saw that it was good.... And God said, Let the earth bring forth living creatures ( nephesh ) after their kind, cattle, and creeping things, and beasts of the earth after their kind: and it was so.*” Before man’s creation even the birds of the air were called living **souls** (*nephesh*).

Yes, before man’s creation this Hebrew term is used as a reference to fish, fowl, creeping things and animals. The next time it is used to reference what man became — a living soul, being, creature, or life. Ask yourself WHY this term wasn’t rendered “soul” in these earlier case? It seems that the translators, already committed to the idea of a man having an immortal soul planted in man, didn’t want to face the facts that fish, fowl, creeping things and animals are also called with the same term man became.

In the New Testament we find the Greek term “*psuche*” with the same meaning of the Old Testament “*nephesh*.” In fact, the Greek Septuagint (LXX) version of the Hebrew Scriptures translate “*nephesh*” with the Greek term “*psuche*” in all occurrences. But never are either term used in a sense of an “immortal soul” as a conscious entity which leaves the body at its death. That is a pure pagan belief.

Leviticus 17:11 states that “the *nephesh/psuche* of the flesh is in the blood.” Take away a person’s blood from the body and you have a lifeless corpse. This same thing can be said about Genesis 2:7 — take away the “breath of life” from the body and man is no longer a living *nephesh/psuche*. A good study would be to examine all verses of the Bible mentioning “blood” shed for the forgiveness of sins. I did, and realized why it is said that Jesus shed his blood for the remission of sins (see Rom. 3:25, 5:29, Eph. 1:7, and Rev. 1:5).

Let’s look again at the Biblical record: The first lie from the Father of Liars! In Genesis 2:17 God said “*but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.*” Then in Genesis, chapter three, we see it recorded that the serpent (Satan) said: “*Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the Garden’? (vs. 1).*” In response, Eve said, “*We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’ (vss. 2–3).*” Satan then said, “***You will not surely die,...for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*** (vs. 4–5).” Now came the “fall.” Eve ate of the tree and tempted Adam to also eat of it (vss. 6–7). Then Adam and Eve heard God walking in the garden and they hid themselves. But God called out “*Where are you?* (vs. 8–9).” Adam answered and said, “*I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.*” Then God said, “*Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree I commanded you not to eat from?*” Adam quickly blamed Eve (vss.

10–12). After bawling out both of them (see vss. 14–18), God finished by saying: “*By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.* (vs. 19).” After kicking Adam and Eve out of the garden, God made the following statement: “*The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.* (vs. 22).”

Satan’s lie contradicted what God had told Adam and Eve. God had told them that they would surely die if they ate of the forbidden tree. However, Satan said, “*You shall not surely die.*” As Jesus said about Satan, “*When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar, and the father of liars*” (John 8:44). Even the Apostle Paul says, “*Let God be true, and every man a liar*” (Rom. 3:4). In Gen. 3:19 God said, “*You are dust, and to dust you shall return.*” The two were then removed from the garden so that they could not take and eat of the tree of life and live forever (in other words, be “immortal”). This record denies that man has a soul. Rather, man became a living *nephesh*, i.e., soul, being, life, creature, person, etc.

The Scriptures warn us that “*the soul (person) that sins shall die*” (Ex. 18:4, 20), and that “*the wages of sin is death*” (Rom. 6:23). Many today teach that death in this case is only a “spiritual separation from God” and not the death of the whole person! That is of the **lie of Satan** when he said “*You shall surely not die.*” However, the penalty for sin which Jesus died for was a blood-letting death. He “partook of flesh and blood” in order to defeat death (Heb. 2:14). Now, if the penalty for sin was simply a “spiritual separation” from God, then the death of Jesus on the cross would be meaningless.

Immortality is not a present reality for Christians. There is only one who is immortal, and that is **God** — “**who alone is immortal**” (see I Tim. 6:15–16). This Scripture reference flies in the face of the “immortal soul” doctrine taken from pagan sources. Scriptures say that Jesus ascended into Heaven, but it never insinuates or states that deceased people go to Heaven when they die. That goes for all the Old Testament saints, except two, and likewise for any new Testament Christians: none of these have yet been made to be immortal!

Hebrews, chapter eleven, is very plain and direct in saying this. It says, “*Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the elders ( presbuteroi ) were commended for*” (vs. 12). Notice that Able, whom Cain killed, was commended for his faith “*and by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead*” (vs. 4). While God told Cain that Abel’s blood cries out from the ground just as his faith still speaks, we understand that **God calls things that are not as if they are**. In verse 5 we see that Enoch pleased God because of his faith, and God took him before he died. This is the sole exception of the Scriptures recording that a person was admitted into Heaven. Some could also include Elijah, which could be, although the Scriptures does not specifically say so. Then there is Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, and the list goes on! “***All were commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect***” (vss. 39–40).

King David was very much aware that he could only praise God while he was living, and that when he died his thoughts perished. In Psalm 146:4 he states: “*His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.*” And in Psalm 146:2, he stated previously: “*While I live I will praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto*

*my God while I have any being.*” The Hebrew word mentioned as “perish” is “abad,” which has the meaning of being “destroyed utterly.” He tells us, in other words that the condition of the dead in Sheol/Hades can be described as “non-being” or “nonexistence.” “While I live” and “while I have any being” have the same meaning. The LXX confirms this by translating the Hebrew of the final clause of Psalm 146:2 with “*as long as I exist.*” Then in other words, when David **ceased to live he also ceased to exist! But his spirit returned to him who gave it!** Compare these two renderings, for they fortify the final clause of Psalm 146 just quoted:

*“If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait until my change comes”* (Job 14:14). Now look at this: ***“For if a man should die, shall he live again? I will wait till I exist again”*** (Job 14:14 LXX).

This shows us that Job believed he would have to wait in Sheol until he existed again (or until he received a new body) at the resurrection on the last day. His status or state between death and resurrection would be one of **non-existence**. Solomon, David’s son, called one of the wisest men to have ever existed, has this to say: *“For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know not anything”* (Eccl. 9:5). Then in verse 10, same chapter, he states: *“Whatsoever thy hands find to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave (Sheol), where thou goes.”* Yes, Solomon confirms what David tells us. And Job adds to this conclusion for us to think upon: ***“So man lies down, and rises not; till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep”*** (Job 14:12). *“Till the heavens be no more”* is quite explicit as to when the General Resurrection will occur — and the dead shall not awake until that last day. (Pages 140–141.)

When does one gain immortality? Let’s let the Apostle Paul answer this from his letter to the Corinthians (I Cor. 15:51–54). *“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We all shall not 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. But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Does this not tell us when believers will “put on” immortality? Sure it does! Those who do not believe this have to argue with the Apostle Paul, not me.

Paul doesn’t say anything in that passage of Scripture about a person having a soul. However, it does tell us that we do not possess immortality until Jesus returns to reward the ones who believe on him. At one’s death the body returns to dust and its spirit, or “breath of life,” returns to the Creator until Jesus returns on the “last day” to give back that “breath of life” to the dead through the resurrection of all mankind. The believers to receive immortality, the unbelievers to receive the penalty for their unbelief, the second death as spoken of in Revelation 20:14 (and indicated via the Greek language used in many other verses of the New Testament Scriptures).

There are many, sad to say, that reject this truth simply because it is spoken by so-called “unorthodox” groups, i.e., those who don’t toe-the-line of mainstream churches. Those who reject this truth don’t seem to be aware that it is also the teachings of the

Scriptures and was the common teaching of the first and second century Christians like Clement of Rome, a companion of Paul; Ignatius, a friend of Polycarp who was a disciple of the Apostle John; Theophilus; Justin Martyr; plus individual groups of Christians throughout all the centuries and today. John Wycliffe and William Tyndale, well known Bible translators, both were outspoken opponents of the “immortal soul” doctrine. Tyndale wrote, *“And you, in putting departed souls in heaven, hell, and purgatory, destroy the arguments wherein Christ and Paul prove the resurrection, which we are warned to look for every hour...If the souls be in heaven, tell me why they be not in as good case as the angels be? And then what cause is there of the resurrection?”* Tyndale wrote this in answer to Sir Thomas Moore’s *“Dialogue,”* Book 4, chapter 2.

Martin Luther, cited by Miles Grant in his book, *Positive Theology,* wrote, *“All that is said concerning the immortality of the soul...is nothing else by an invention of anti-Christ to make his pot boil.”* Luther held to Paul’s teaching that the hope of man is rooted in the resurrection of the dead on the last day. He also was a strong believer in what is so-called “soul-sleep” by adversaries with their “immortal soul” theory, preferring to use “sleep in Hades” (i.e., the grave) just as the writers of Scriptures describe it. In Job, chapter 14, we read: *“so man lies down and rises not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be roused out of their sleep. Oh that thou would hide me in Sheol (Hades), that thou would keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou would appoint me a set time, and remember me”* (vss. 12–13).

In 1513 AD Pope Leo X, in a decree that was aimed at Luther and his followers, condemned *“all those who assent that the soul is mortal...”* Luther was teaching that no part of man was immortal, but that immortality was God’s gift through Jesus the Christ, and that it would only be given to believers on the last day when Jesus returned. The Pope’s decree, in effect, turned many away from a resurrection belief to the pagan belief in an immortal soul theory. To Christians who believe the Word of God in the Scriptures, immortal life is assured through faith in Jesus, the Christ of God, when he returns and resurrects the dead and/or changes those living at that time into glorified immortal beings (see John 5:16–30).

An interesting thing happens when translators, whom all have some partisan beliefs, seek to translate Matthew 16:25–26. In the New Testament, the Greek word *psyche* occurs over 100 times. It is sometimes translated life and sometimes soul, leaving room for much confusion.

*“For whoever want to save his life (psyche) will lose it, but whoever loses his life (psyche) for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul (psyche)? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul (psyche).”*

This is quoted from the NIV, and the KJV records it likewise. Both of these versions do not translate the Greek term *psyche* the same in all four places. All the Old Greek manuscripts record the term as *psyche* in all places. These two versions are the most used Bible in English today. The ones translating these version all belonged to denominations that believe the “soul” is something possessed by mankind. For those of the Roman Catholic persuasion, well, they face the same problem. The Latin Vulgate version of the Greek manuscripts translates all four occurrences the same (i.e., with the term “animam”), but the translations of that version do not. The Douay Rheims versions, which supposedly followed the Latin Vulgate, does the same as the NIV and KJV when it comes to these two verses of Scripture in Matthew.

However, even Catholic Doctors of that church, along with Scholars and Theologians who translate the Scriptures agree that the term “soul” does not mean an **entity** within the body of man that is immortal. *The Catholic Encyclopedia* says:

“*Nepes* comes from an original root...to breathe, and...thence, breath of life. Since breath distinguishes the living from the dead, *nepes* is used in regard to both animals and humans... After death, the *nepes* goes to *sheol* [Hebrew word for grave]. The above summary indicates that there is no dichotomy of body and soul in the Old Testament...other words in the Old Testament such as spirit, flesh, and heart also signify the human person and differ only as various aspects of the same being. **The notion of the soul surviving after death is not readily discernible in the Bible.** The concept of the human soul itself is not the same in the Old Testament as it is in Greek and modern philosophy...**The soul in the Old Testament means not a part of man, but the whole man—man as a living being**” (*The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967, art. “*Soul, Human, Immortality of*”).

And in another place:

“The soul in the OT means not a part of man, but the whole man as a living being. Similarly in the NT, it signifies human life: the life of an individual conscious object (Matt 2:20; 6:25; Luke 12:22-23; 14:26; John 10:11,15,17; John 13:37; Acts 27:10, 22; Phil 2:30; 1Thess 2:8). Recent exegetes...have maintained that **the NT does not teach the immortality of the soul in the Hellenistic sense of survival of an immortal principle after death** (*The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, art. “*Soul, Human, Immortality of, In The Bible.*”).

The Scholars who wrote this in the Catholic Encyclopedia gives great encouragement to those who want to know the real TRUTH. At the time of Luther these same scholars would have been excommunicated for saying what is said above, but times have changed, and God’s word in the Scriptures “cannot”, as Jesus said, “be broken”.

Thus we find ourselves having to ask a very important questions: “Just WHO are we to believe? The pagan theory from Plato of an immortal soul being placed in man at birth, or what God has to say in the Bible?” As to the so-called “Fathers” of the Church, we also have to ask, “Are their opinions more valuable than what the Scriptures reveal about these things?” What do you say?

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