

One Problem, One Solution

By

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When asked the question: “What would you single out as the reigning tenets of our time?” Dr. Elton Trueblood answered, “The first of these is the extreme belief that all our problems are new.” Trueblood insists that man’s chief problems are the same as

One reason the churches of our day fail to supply man’s need is because they are trying to solve all the problems of the world except the one great problem of humanity for which Christ alone supplies the solution.

The religious professionals pronounce upon social and political issues, debate national policies, promote greater and more complex institutions and build more luxurious buildings. They then fill these buildings with people who remain unsettled, fraught with despair and with no assurance of their eternal destiny. In spite of all the scientific data, new gadgets and space-age speed, we still face the same problem the race has always faced: the fact that we are dust; the fact that we are mortal.

This is the one universal human problem, the problem which must be solved before any of the other problems are even worth solving. At no time in history has this fact been so prominent in men’s minds as it is in this day when the world is threatened with the possibility of sudden death by nuclear weapons. Yet, in spite of the constant reminder of our mortality, there is nothing the race deplors any more than a facing up to the fact that its destiny, its very life, is dependent upon the One who created it and upon the terms which He has given.

The effort to evade our mortality has given rise to doctrines of universalism which fly in the teeth of God’s word. It has caused the desperate resurrection of ancient cult practices of black magic and voodooism. Satan, the great deceiver, has succeeded in persuading many of his original lie: “Thou shall not surely die.”

Traditional Christianity has failed to give a clear answer to this question of our mortality. The hope of future life for the Christian is lost in a mystical synthesis of soul-life in a never-never land beyond the sky. The doom of the unbeliever has been robbed of its distinct and definite terror by spiritualizing it. The subjects of Heaven and Hell have become fitting objects for the attachment of funny punch lines. If you don’t pass the test with St. Peter at Heaven’s gate, then you will have plenty of company shoveling coal into Hell’s oven door! In the words of a song by Charles Wakefield Cadman, written in honor of those who died in World War I, “*There Is No Death.*” Unregenerate man welcomes the idea. Man will not die because he is an immortal creature. He will not die because he cannot! This philosophy — which comes from Plato and not Jesus — is so popular that death has lost its meaning as the judgment for sin.

The traditional religious view is that man is not mortal, but immortal. Some teach that God puts an “eternal soul” into man at his birth. Others believe that the eternal quality is passed through the physical procreation. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that at womb. In one way or another man is convinced that he is already an immortal creature, that he is eternal and that he cannot die, that his soul must go on living forever.

When one talks of death in the sick room there is reality and urgency. When the physician speaks of death there is tragedy in his voice. But when the preacher speaks of death it is taken as a mere symbol of transformation; in the pulpit the terms have taken on meaning entirely, irrelevant to anything we know either from Biblical revelation or from our experience. The Bible offers only the two alternatives, eternal life, or death: “The wages, of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life” (Romans 6:23). The wages earned for sin is death, not life.

Is man eternal? Is this the meaning of man being made “in the image of God?” The answer must be in the negative. If man were eternal as God is, he would be without beginning as well as without end. Furthermore, he would be changeless, for this is the meaning of God’s eternity. He is the changeless one. Certainly this is not true of man. Nothing in scripture or in experience teaches us that man is eternal or immortal.

In fact, the word “immortal” is used only once in the Bible, (1 Timothy 1:17) and in this instance applies to God. “Immortality” can be found only 5 times: Romans 2:7, where it is something we are to “seek,” because we do **NOT YET** have it; 1 Corinthians 15:53 and again in verse 54, where it is something Christians will “put on” at the time of the resurrection; in I Timothy 6:16, where it speaks of the Resurrected Christ as the **ONLY** One who as yet has immortality, and finally in 2 Timothy 1:10, where it is something Christ came to reveal. Therefore from the Bible one can derive no assurance that he is by nature something that is going to live forever merely by virtue of being born. He does not possess anything immortal but is very much mortal.

What about the “eternal soul.” Does man possess a “soul” that cannot die? Allow the Scripture to speak: “Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine the soul that sins, it shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4). Jesus said that we should “fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna” (Matthew 10:28). “Gehenna” refers to the Valley of Hinnom, a valley bordering on Jerusalem where the idolaters sacrificed their children to Moloch in fire, and which later became the city dump of Jerusalem where dead bodies were cast to be consumed in the ever-burning wastes. So, the Bible does teach a fiery Hell, a literal burning of the unrighteous; not a place where souls shall live, but a place where they shall be destroyed. They are not immortal.

Man is mortal. This is his problem. He will die! Even with antibiotics and all the miracle drugs no man can postpone his death indefinitely. The Newspapers and the airwaves are filled with the perpetual news of men dying, and it is considered tragic by all. Indeed, it is tragic! In the day of judgment men will be raised up to face the Creator for their sins, and then cast into the “Gehenna,” the “lake of fire which is the second death,” for destruction. “For the wages of sin is death.” No man can bring himself back from the grave. The

power of life is in the Creator, not the created. Hence man is helpless, for he has sinned and can neither forgive his own sins nor escape the ultimate punishment for them. You do not possess a quality of inherent life. Only Jesus does. There is no “immortal soul” within us to restore us to life. Man does not possess a soul, he **IS** a soul. “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” (Genesis 2:7).

God is not offering a choice of places to live in for eternity. In spite of the oft-repeated question: “where will you spend eternity?” As if you could take your choice of living in bliss or living in an inferno. The choice is not where you will go or where you will be, but whether or not you shall live at all. The contrast is between life and death. One either receives eternal life, or he perishes. It is either the gift of God, the life God gives for eternity, or the punishment of God, and that punishment is death. Hence it is eternal punishment.

As long as man fails to see the “either/or” situation he faces, he will go on ignoring the basic problem: his mortality. In spite of the fact that death is more feared by most than anything in the world, most people simply refuse to consider it in its reality; somehow, they think, it will not really happen!

It is for this reason - failure to see man’s mortality as a basic problem — that modern religious professionals no longer see any necessity in blood atonement, the virgin birth and the resurrection. If man is going to live, irrespective of sin and judgment, if he cannot die anyway, then the substitutionary death of Jesus is meaningless. If there is no death, if all are immortal, then the problem of man is something else, and it is not solved by Jesus dying in man’s place.

Similarly the resurrection has become superfluous. If man is not to die, if he already is immortal, then a bodily resurrection has no place in his “eternal life.”

Instead of discussing the human problem, men discuss “space age” religion. There is a new morality, a new age, a new approach, and a new creed for most every church. The religious professionals continue to build their institutions, creating a religious facade behind which there is no longer any religious reality. They contend that times have changed.

But the purpose of God has not changed. Man’s nature has not changed. He is still an entity of spirit-body, the mortal soul which God created, facing the problem of how to salvage his life from the inevitable destruction of the world (2 Pet. 3:7). He may move faster, use different tools and live under a different social system, but he still is the same mortal creature, falling short of the glory of God and facing the final destruction in the Judgment Day. What does speed or antibiotics or science have to do with it? The problem remains.

The solution, also, remains the same. “The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23) God has the solution. The death-penalty was met by Jesus on

the cross, so that a man can stand justified in God's sight, and live! When Christ comes He will make all the redeemed immortal like Himself, so that they may live forever. Only by Christ's redemption — by Christ's substitutionary death for man; by this act of Grace on God's part and the receiving of it on man's part — only then can a man become immortal and hence fulfill the purpose of God and the purpose of his own existence.

There are many problems and they grow more complex every day, but Jesus did not offer to solve all the world's daily difficulties. "For what shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life?" (Matt 16:26). He came to give LIFE. When a man is right with God, so that he may have eternal life, he can then face any problem. If he can find no solution to his problem, at least he has reason to endure them and bear up under them, but the amazing thing is that when a person solves the problem of his mortality, most of the other problems are solved in the process.

Whatever changes take place, they will not change man's mortality. In the midst of change, our only hope lies in holding fast to the Ancient of Days, and to His ancient Gospel, through which we may attain immortality.

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