

GATEWAY TO LIFE

By

Curtis Dickinson

Witchcraft and Occultism increase in proportion to the decline of true Christian faith. Death is so abhorrent to man that he will search any and every field for an answer to the questions: "If a man die, shall he live again?"

Walter R. Martin, in his book, "Kingdom of the Cults", points out that the main deceit of the spiritists is to convince people that, "You shall not surely die!" (Gen. 3:4), the words of Satan. The calling up of "familiar spirits" by the medium serves to deceive the relatives of the departed one into believing that the soul continues to live and evolve after death from this life, in contradiction to Isaiah 26:14 and other Scriptures.

Paul called death an "enemy" (I Cor. 15:26), and when men are not grounded in the Christian hope of resurrection, they turn to Satan's promise and the hope that death is not real, that their loved ones are enjoying life in another world. This is the main reason people attend séances and support mediums. Ben Alexander, who was a spiritist could NOT contact the dead, but only contacted demons who impersonated the dead.

Interest in death has become so intense among teenagers that schools are now offering courses in its study. For example, the Northland High School in Columbus, Ohio had an eight-week course entitled, "On Death and Dying."

In his book, "The Life Beyond Death," Arthur Ford, one of the world's most famous mediums, said "80% of the questions people ask me have to do with the nature of life after death."

It is a sad commentary upon the church that the general public resorts to spiritualism, witchcraft and E.S.P. to find an answer which is actually revealed ONLY in the Bible. In the book, "On Death and Dying," the Doctor-Author suggests that "if we take part in church activities in order to socialize...then we are deprived of the church's former purpose, namely to give hope, a purpose in tragedies here on earth, and an attempt to understand and bring meaning to otherwise unacceptable painful occurrences in our life." How tragic that the church, with the marvelous truth of LIFE in Christ as its God-given message to a dying world, has busied itself with social activities and promotional programs of every kind except the promotion of the most desperately needed message, until people go to church for social and business reasons, but turn to spiritualists and witches for the basic needs!

Men's traditions have so confused the meaning of life after death that it is filled with contradictions, and most people simply lay off the subject rather than enter into emotion-packed debate.

Is there life after death? The answer is both Yes, and No. For the unbeliever the answer is, No. He is one "having no hope and without God" (Eph. 2:12). The wages of sin is death, not life. The apostles, as far as the record goes, never confronted an audience with "Where will you spend eternity?", as modern evangelists do. Instead they offered the choice of Life or Death. In every recorded sermon by Jesus or the apostles, and in the epistles, there is not one breath of hope held out to the sinner that he will live through eternity. Rather he is warned of death, the lake of fire, Gehenna (hell), where he will be

destroyed. “He that believes shall not PERISH but have everlasting life,” which obviously means that if he doesn’t believe he will NOT have life, but will perish.

Expressions such as “immortal soul” and “eternal soul” add fuel to the confusion. Such expressions are not found in the Bible, although they are found in ancient pagan literature. The way some people talk of “souls” one would think that God has a great supply of “souls.” And whenever a child is born, He implants a soul into that body; then when the body does, God just snatches that soul back to heaven! But in Scripture the term is not employed this way. Professor Howard Hayes, writing in the Christian Standard, says, “Scripturally, the soul is the life, not some ethereal, ineffable, immortal something which man possesses for a while before it joins the boundless sea of the unutterable in some far-off nonmaterial abode. The body-soul concept is our heritage from Greek philosophy, not from divine revelation; from Plato, not from Paul.” It may shock a lot of Christians to learn that much church doctrine on life after death comes from the pagan philosopher Plato, and not from the inspired apostle Paul.

What does the Bible say about the soul? “And God formed man of the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7). Man IS a soul.

“The soul that sins, it shall die” (Ezek. 18:4). This is the reason Christ came into the world, to die in the sinner’s stead and pay the penalty for his sin as he “poured out his soul unto death” (Isa. 53:12). All who do not receive Christ will have to die for themselves! Therefore for them, they will be resurrected in the last day to face judgment, and then cast into the lake of fire for their final and eternal destruction (Matt. 3:12, II Thess. 1:7–9, II Peter 3:5–7, John 5:29, Matt. 10:28).

For believers the answer is Yes. He shall live again, forever. Christ has already undergone the sin-penalty by his death, “who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree” (I Peter 2:24), “by which will we have been sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb. 10:10). The Christian, therefore, does not face condemnation for his sin because of God’s grace provided through Christ (Rom. 8:1).

Job raised the question, “If a man die shall he live again?” (Job 14:14). Then in the depths of tragedy and suffering Job cried out, “For I know that my redeemer lives, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God; who I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed with me” (Job 19:25–27).

Note that Job did not expect to see his Lord immediately at death, but rather in the last day, at the time of resurrection, for he says that from his flesh and with his own eyes he will see Him. The hope of life after death is in the RESURRECTION.

Jesus emphasized that man would receive his reward, not at death, but at the resurrection. “But when you make a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and you shall be blessed: for they cannot recompense you; for you shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:13–14). God’s servants do not “receive their reward” at death. For example, Peter said, “Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with unto this day...For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he said himself, ‘The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit yourself on my right hand until I make your foes your footstool’” (Acts 2:29, 34–35). Jesus said, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and

receive you unto myself; that where I am you may be also” (John 14:3). Note that it is when He comes again that the reception takes place. Peter wrote that “when the chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away” (I Peter 5:4. Also Col. 3:4). Obviously we are not to expect glory and immortality until Christ returns to raise the dead, and at that time the saints will “put on immortality” (I Cor. 15:51–55). The saints will be rewarded in that day. “Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me” (Rev. 22:12).

Although Paul spoke of his desire to depart “and to be at home with the Lord” he explained that his desire was to be “clothed upon, that what is mortal may be swallowed up of life” (I Cor. 5:4), and that “we groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:22–23).

Why belabor the point? Because in the church there is conflicting doctrine which holds that departed saints “have passed to their reward.” Does this not deny the resurrection? If the reward happens at death, then what is the meaning of all that the apostles and Jesus taught about resurrection as the hope of the believer? Note what Paul writes, “For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised; and if Christ has not been raised your faith is vain; you are yet in your sins. Then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (I Cor. 15:16–18).

Paganism holds to the superstition that man passes into another form at death, thus not actually dying but entering a realm where things are either better or worse. The Bible teaches that man does die, but will be resurrected from death, and then either given life that is eternal in God’s new heavens and earth, or else put to death in the lake of fire. The church often echoes Plato’s pagan idea, that death is not death but a mere transition to another stage of life. As the Swedish Lutheran Theologian Gustaf Aulen has said, “Death in this sense has lost the profound seriousness which it has in Christian faith.” Jesus plainly said that He came to give life, that He is the resurrection, and that He will raise up the dead in the last day. This He demonstrated by His own resurrection. Paul writes that by Christ’s death and resurrection He ‘brought life and immortality to light’ (II Tim. 1:10). Now, if life after death is to be something other than life through a resurrected body, it is hard to see how that life is brought to light by Christ’s death and resurrection. In fact, if the Christian life after death is NOT life by a resurrection of the body, then Christ’s resurrection was not the “first-fruits of them that sleep” (I Cor. 15:20) and Paul grossly misrepresented the whole thing!

When Lazarus died, Jesus was confronted with the grieving sisters, Mary and Martha, who were dear friends of His. It is highly significant that Jesus gave none of the platitudes that are so common today. He did not say that Lazarus was alive, that he had passed to his reward, or that he was in “glory.” Instead, He said, “You both will rise again.” Then, to prove that He is the One with power to raise the dead, Jesus went to the tomb and called Lazarus forth from the grave. Lazarus responded as a whole person, and death was defeated. Lazarus lived by a resurrection.

Jesus said, “The hour comes in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28–29).

The answer is not found in psychic research, ESP, witchcraft nor in spiritualism. Neither is it found in funeralistic platitudes, where the attempt at giving comfort amounts to a refusal to accept the reality of death. The answer is found only in Christ, Who said,

“I am the resurrection and the life.” Resurrection is held forth throughout the Bible as the only GATEWAY TO FUTURE LIFE.

The Bible does not declare that man has a “never-dying soul”, but it does promise victory over death and eternal life to those who commit their lives to God through Christ.

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