

HOPE FOR MORTAL MAN

By

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Current concepts of man and death are unscriptural and invalidate the meaning of the central facts of the Christian faith: Christ's death and resurrection.

“What is man?” — Asked David in Psalms 8:4.

Is man an immortal soul in a material body? What is death? What is life? Are the unrepentant dead now suffering perpetual torment? Are the dead in Christ already enjoying a glorified state of immortality? What about judgment?

The question of man's nature, purpose and destiny has puzzled men through the ages until in our present day there is a massive and grotesque accumulation of theories, which range from nirvana of Buddhism through the medieval concept of purgatory down to present concepts of reincarnation.

Even the ideas of Christians are varied, contradictory and for the most part mysterious. It is widely believed that the “soul,” to quote a famous evangelist, “is something down inside of you.” This “soul” is said to be immortal and that it must go on living in some kind of conscious existence forever. The idea expressed at many funerals is that the dead person has not died after all: that, in fact, death is the entrance into a greater life. When speaking of the fate of unbelievers, evangelists often assign them to “separation from God” with life continuing in a state of misery.

Does this belief come from Scripture? Since the Scripture asks the question, “What is man?” – Let the Scripture answer:

“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” (Gen 2:7).

Note that while the thing formed was as yet not living, it was still called “man.” When the breath of life entered the man, he became a “living soul.” In other words, you do not **have** a soul, you **are** a soul. This is the way the term is used in both Old and New Testaments. For example, in writing of Noah's ark, Peter says, “Wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water” (1 Pet. 3:20).

The assumption that every person is made up of a perishable physical body and an imperishable, indestructible soul grew out of Platonic philosophy and not from Scripture. The Bible, instead of teaching that every person is immortal, teaches that God is the only One who is immortal. “Who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords: Who only has immortality” (1 Tim. 6:15-16).

Professor R. L. Whitelaw has written: "Nowhere does the Bible teach that man has a soul added to and temporarily held in a body, but bound to live on somewhere forever. That is a fiction of Greek mythology, itself born of the first and deadly lie Satan implanted in Eve's mind: 'Thou shalt surely die?' Nowhere does the Bible teach that man has two separable parts, much less three, and that one can continue in self-conscious life without the other; nowhere does the Bible confuse 'spirit' which is either breath or life principle, and 'soul' which is the whole man as a living sentient being. And nowhere does the Bible use the silly phrase 'spiritual death.'" (*The Blessed Hope: What Makes It Blessed?*).

The apostle Paul spoke of immortality, not as something everyone possesses" but a future hope of the believer to be "put on" at the resurrection. "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 corruption shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in Victory" (1 Cor. 15:52-54). Note that this does not occur until the day of resurrection.

The apostles viewed eternal Life and immortality as a gift from God. not the natural and inherent right of every person. "The wages of sin is death. But the -gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). With this in mind Paul wrote that "God ...will render to every man according to his work: to them that by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and incorruption, eternal life" (Rom.2:6-7). We seek for incorruption and eternal life. which God will bestow in the day of resurrection.

Jesus plainly set forth the fact that those who "believe on him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). If man already possessed such life that could not perish, these words of Jesus would be meaningless.

The assumption that man has a natural-born immortality has been the basis for the invention of many harmful innovations contrary to Christian faith. Among these are Mariolatry, Purgatory, Limbo, prayers for the dead and to the dead, messages from the dead and fear of the dead. The belief in natural immortality of all men has changed the Scriptural picture of hell as a place of death to a place of life, where God roasts His victims forever in a chamber of horrors! Thus the ungodly never really die.

On the contrary, the whole idea of the Gospel is that man IS perishable, and that unless he repents and turns to God he will die. The Bible teaches that the eternal punishment of the ungodly consists in the direct antithesis of life; that is, death or destruction. The plain terms of Scripture are: "The soul that sins shall die" (Ezek.18:4) and "If any man destroys the temple of God, him will God destroy" (1 Cor. 3:17).

Such destruction is to take place at the return of Christ, The Judge, when all the dead are raised up to life. The eternal punishment of the ungodly consists in their final and irrevocable death. The Scriptures say they shall **be slain** (Isaiah 65:15; Luke 19:27), **be destroyed** (1 Cor. 3:17; Psalm 37:38, 92:7; Matt. 10:28), **suffer destruction** (Psalm 73:18; Matt. 7:13; Phil. 3:19; 2 Thess. 1:9), **perish**, (Psalm 37:20; Luke 15,3; 2 Pet.2:12),

be consumed (Psalm 37:20; Isaiah 1:28), **suffer death** (Rom. 6:21, 23; Rev. 21:8), **be burned up** (Heb. 6:8; Matt 3:12; Malachi 4:1-2; 2 Pet. 3:7,10).

Set against this background of death and destruction of man for his sin is the Good News that "Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6). The Scripture teaches that Jesus was a flesh and blood man in order that he might take man's place in a human death: "That by the grace of God he might taste death for every man." "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage" (Heb. 2:14-15).

Salvation is nothing less than the salvaging of man from ultimate destruction that he might have life in God's image, and it is accomplished through Christ receiving the sentence of death, "the just for the unjust," thus satisfying the just penalty for sin with regard to all those who through faith are called his people. We may have full assurance for our salvation because Christ paid the full price of our sins: death – nothing more and nothing less.

Man is not endowed with perpetual life, neither by any natural possession of some eternal quality nor by any power within himself. Man as a "living soul," is mortal and death bound. The Bible views him as dead: dead in his trespasses and sins. Dead in the sense of mortality as well as dead judicially; under the sentence of the second and final death.

Life and immortality is possible only through the one who is the "way, the truth and the life," who is the "resurrection and the life." who came that we "may have life abundantly."

Therefore man is not by nature immortal. He was created for immortality, but lost the right to it through sin (Gen.3:22-24). He is not immortal but rather a candidate for immortality. Eternal life is a gift that God "who only has immortality" will confer upon those who by faith willingly receive it and accept the conditions God has given.

"Thanks be unto God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." "Who has abolished death and has brought LIFE and IMMORTALITY to light through the gospel" (1 Cor. 15:57; 2 Timothy 1:10).

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