

IMMORTALITY

By

Curtis Dickinson

The gospel, foundation of Christian faith, is defined by Paul as the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (I Cor. 15:1–4). Our faith will be just as secure and meaningful as our understanding of the meaning of this gospel. In spite of the great emphasis Jesus and the Apostles placed upon the resurrection to immortality, it is a most neglected doctrine in our day. The trend is to clothe the subject of death in terms that mystify it and thus negate the meaning of resurrection and immortality.

One man tells us that the fear of death is present in our mental functioning at all times (Compare Heb. 2:14–15). Melanie Klein, a British psychologist, adds that the fear of death is at the root of all human anxiety. Yet death has become the forbidden subject in our generation. We talk of sex openly, but run from the subject of death. Dr. Rollo May feels that this type of repression is what makes modern life banal and empty.

Meaning and purpose must be predicated upon objective fact. That is exactly what the gospel supplies: the fact that Jesus died in the mortal flesh of humanity, was resurrected to life again and is alive today. Paul went so far as to say that Christ's resurrection proves the resurrection of the race, and that if there is no resurrection of the race, and that if there is no resurrection there is no faith, no forgiveness of sin, and that even the saints of God have perished (I Cor. 15:16–19). Everything depends on the resurrection.

This is quite different from the popular doctrine of our day, that the dead go immediately to their reward. In fact men are applying to the state of death the language which God used to describe the glorious life of immortality His saints enter into at the resurrection. We often hear the preacher say that the “dear brother has gone to glory” even though he has been reading from I Cor. 15, which states that “it is sown in dishonor: it is raised in glory” (I Cor. 15:43). It is in the resurrection, and not before, that we shall appear, with Christ in glory and be as he is (Col. 3:4, I John 3:2).

According to the Jewish Encyclopedia, “The belief in the immortality of the soul came to the Jews from contact with Greek thought, and chiefly through the philosophy of Plato, the principal exponent, who was led to it through Orphic and Eleusian mysteries, in which Babylonian and Egyptian views were strangely blended.” Plato, born in 429 BC, studied in Egypt and taught their doctrine of immortality in Greek schools. Jesus challenged this teaching by constantly insisting that He was the resurrection and the life, that there was life only in Himself, that He had power to give life and that at the resurrection some would be raised to eternal life and some to eternal destruction. These were the only two alternatives: he that believes shall have eternal life, and he that believes not shall perish (John 11:25, 3:36, 5:21, 5:28–29, 3:16).

What then, of the “immortal soul” theory and a “never-dying spirit?” Search as you may, you will not find these terms in God's revealed word, but only in the speculative writings of men. The word soul is used in the Bible 857 times, 752 times in the Old Testament, and 105 times in the New Testament. It is not called “immortal soul” even once in all the 857 times it is used. The word “spirit” is used in the Bible 785 times:

in the Old Testament 400 times and in the New Testament 385 times. Yet in the 785 times that “spirit” is found in the Bible, it is never once spoken of as a “never-dying” or “immortal” spirit. (Figures from “Man And His Destiny”)

The word “immortal,” is used just once in Scripture. “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever” (I Tim. 1:17). Here it applies to God alone. It is never applied to any man. The term “immortality” is found only five times in the Bible, as follows:

1. “The King of kings, Lord of lords; who only has immortality, dwelling in light unapproachable” (I Tim. 6:15–16). This verse declares that God only has immortality!

2. “But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death, and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (II Tim. 1:10). Through the gospel Jesus demonstrates the meaning of immortality, and the fact that there is hope for man to obtain it.

3. “To them that by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality (sometimes translated as incorruption) eternal life:” (Rom. 2:7). Here is positive assurance that the believer may find immortality, seeking for it in patience and well-doing. He does not have it while he seeks, or he would not be seeking it!

4. “Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall 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 corruption must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (I Cor. 15:51–53). We remain corruptible or mortal until the resurrection, when Christians are raised, or changed from mortal to immortal beings.

5. “So when this corruptible 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” (I Cor. 15:54). This verse is further explanation of the resurrection, showing that immortality will not be ours at death, but at the time death is swallowed up in victory at the resurrection.

Of course one’s future destiny is sealed at the time of one’s death. To die in sin is to be resurrected to the sentence of death in the lake of fire, but to die in Christ is to be resurrected to immortality to live in the presence of God and Jesus in a new creation and new world.

No one can give immortality but God. Life is God-created. It is given only on God’s terms. He has said, “The soul that sins it shall die.” The only way to avoid such death in judgment is to come to terms with God, a facing up to sin—our own total inability to be either sinless or to eradicate past sins—and finally to humble ourselves before God in repentance and faith. For many, and perhaps most, this is something worse than death, so men avoid the confrontation by accepting the philosophy that somehow all will live by natural immortality. Others get involved in benevolent societies, join a church full of activities, or find some religion that offers a solution without facing the issues of sin, faith and obedience to God. Nothing like that is going to change one from sinner to saint, nor will it qualify a person for immortality. What God insists on is a new creature, a person who recognizes his own righteousness as totally inadequate, and then accepts the righteousness of God through faith in Christ (Phil. 3:9). It means that one acknowledges he is a mortal (dying) sinner before God and deserves the final death God

promises to all such sinners, but believes that Christ died such death for him. One must humbly accept God's offer on God's terms to receive God's reward, immortality!

Pagan religious hopes such as reincarnation are totally impossible, since only Christians may have immortality, and that in a new body that is eternal.

Ambiguous theology is detrimental to Christian life and purpose. If all have immortality, then the resurrection loses its impact and becomes only a kind of fringe benefit, rather than the distinctive and unique offer that it really is. If all have immortality then resurrection loses its connection between death and life. Christ's resurrection brought life and immortality to light. But if an immortal soul is our natural possession, then one is hard put to see how his resurrection in the flesh could demonstrate it!

Christ's promise, that gives hope and meaning to this transient life, is "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am there you may be also!" (John 14:3). Therefore Paul instructs us to "sorrows not as those who have no hope" for when Christ comes, "the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we that are alive" will be caught up to be with the Lord forever (I Thess. 4:13-17).

The glories of immortality are not fully revealed, but there are numerous statements that give us some idea of the future life.

Obviously the body that is deathless and incorruptible must have different qualities from the present mortal body we have. Paul writes that it must be changed, and when Christ comes he "shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory" (Phil. 3:20-21). At last we shall reach the desired goal of creation: the image of God. "It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (I Cor. 15:42-44). It is the person who was buried that is raised, but he is "changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" and this "mortal must put on immortality."

That which gave the apostles and early Christians the incentive to face horrible persecution with gladness was not an ambiguous idea of a future life of ethereal or ghostly proportions, but a conviction that they were headed for immortality. Paul wrote that the pagan has the smell of death, while the Christian has the smell of life (II Cor. 2:16). Of all that is found on the face of the earth, the only thing to survive for eternity is the believer, who is to be resurrected to life as was Christ. Such people have a different outlook on the world. We see the world as temporal, as a workshop where we labor—not for the socialist's "better world" but for God's purpose, for men's salvation. We also see trouble as temporal, the affliction which is "but for the moment," but which works for us "an eternal weight of Glory" in the resurrection (II Cor. 4:17). The "Now" religion, which seeks for health, wealth and pleasure now, is not the religion of Christ, and will only lead to frustration in the world that is ever dying. Those who seek for life's reward's now, will neither get them here, nor get life eternal; but those who seek for immortality, will get both; satisfaction and peace now, and in eternity, immortality (Mt. 10:39).

.....
Copyright © Curtis Dickinson. Formatted and Posted by Ken Fortier Ministries.
Permission is hereby granted by Mrs. Regina Dickinson to reproduce and distribute
Curtis' articles to as many as possible. This statement is to remain attached to this article
for permission to be valid. Vol. XV, Number 3.
.....