

THE BIBLE ON DEATH

By

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The first sin was the result of a woman consulting a medium, and believing the medium's lie about death. People have been believing the lie ever since.

In Genesis 3 the Bible tells us about a serpent beguiling Eve with a lie to tempt her to sin. Jesus said that Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44), so it is not surprising that Satan's medium, the snake, should use a lie to bring about her destruction.

But notice what the lie was. God had said to Adam and Eve that if they ate of the forbidden tree they would "**surely die**" (Gen. 2:17). Then came Satan with the lie: "**You shall not surely die**" (Gen. 3:4).

Witchcraft and spiritism rely on their victim believing the lie of Satan. Grieving parents, husbands and wives seek the mediums, hoping to get a message from their "departed" loved ones, being convinced that they have not died, but merely moved into another realm of life.

To increase confusion the church encourages the idea at almost every funeral. "Our beloved brother has not died," the minister will say. "He has only moved into a larger room, where he has received his heavenly reward, and is now more alive, free and happy than ever before."

But is this what Scripture tells us? Hardly! A classic example of the death of a believed person is that of Lazarus. Yet, when Jesus sought to comfort his family, he did NOT say that Lazarus had not died, or that he had received his reward. First He said that Lazarus was asleep. When they failed to understand, Jesus "said to them plainly, Lazarus is dead" (John 11:11-14). What an opportunity Jesus had to explain that death was not death at all, but rather the release of the soul to a larger life. Yet he plainly said that Lazarus was both asleep and dead.

Certainly it is not necessary for one to know all the Bible teaches on all subjects in order for him to know the saving grace of God but, as someone has said, our trouble is not what we don't know, but the things we know that aren't true. Such are some things commonly believed about death, — the idea that one cannot really die, that there is no death, that when he dies he is alive, that dead saints are already enjoying their reward of glory and that the unsaved already serve their sentence in hell. These beliefs may be held by the majority, but they not only obscure the gospel and place a stumbling block in the path of many who seek truth, but also disturb the peace and dampen the joy of true Christians.

IMMORTALITY. That man is mortal, and can be made immortal only through a resurrection to eternal life is the plain doctrine as given by Christ and the apostles. In spite of this, the common belief is that everyone possesses an "immortal soul."

Where did this doctrine come from? Not once was it espoused by Jesus. Never did Paul or the other apostles speak of an eternal or immortal soul. It did not come from God's revelation, but Satan's deception — "you shall NOT surely die." Writing in "The Christian Standard" (Oct. 10, 1976) John Casey says "Christianity was born in an age that was heavily influenced by Greek mythology and philosophy. New Testament teachings

are amazingly free, even antithetical to that which surrounded it on every side. Greeks who espoused the Platonic concept of death viewed the body as the prison-house of the soul. The soul was something of an ethereal substance, possessive of consciousness, but void of material embodiment. It left the body at the moment of death, taking its journey into the inner parts of the earth, entering through some large crevice.”

Many so-called Bible scholars are devout students of Plato, and derive their theology from the pagan Greek rather than from that revealed by God. If, as the popular idea goes, a person is immortal and cannot die, it must be admitted that at what we call death, he simply migrates to another form or to another place, and continues to live. If, as the preacher often says at the funeral, the dead son or daughter is more alive than ever, and freed from the mortal bonds of flesh, they why is it not possible and desirable to contact that person through a medium? And, if death is only transition, of what value is the doctrine of the resurrection?

Alternatives usually suggest in evangelism are life in heaven or life in hell. Such alternatives are not found in the preaching of Christ and the apostles. Jesus gave the alternatives of life or death. Either one believes and has eternal life, or he disbelieves and perishes (John 3:16). The wicked go into eternal punishment, that punishment being death, not existence in eternal misery. Believers are saved from that death by Christ’s death for them, and receive eternal life. The question is not one of location, but of LIFE itself.

To quote Mr. Casey again, “As followers of Christ we ought to bring our views of death and life into conformity with the teachings of the Scriptures. When ever we depart from the sacred writings we give the enemies of the faith access to our vulnerability. For if it can be proved that we are preaching and teaching a substitute doctrine because it is more comfortable, then it is proof positive that we are not a people of the Book.”

In Scripture the terms for “immortal” and “immortality” are mentioned only 5 times. (See **Immortality**, Vol. XV, #3.) Not one of these scriptures suggests that man is immortal, but on the contrary state that immortality is something that is to be attained by the believer at the resurrection. Paul’s preaching centered on the resurrection of the dead as the only hope. In his strongest argument to the Greeks he stated that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then those who have died, even the dead Christians, have perished (I Cor. 15:18). This is diametrically opposed to the popular belief that one receives his reward at death and is enjoying immortal bliss in heaven.

SPIRITUAL DEATH. It is amazing how far some will go to uphold “a substitute doctrine because it is more comfortable.” A Bible correspondence course published by a church which emphasizes the slogan that “where the Bible speaks we speak” finds it necessary to insert the qualifying word “spiritual” into scripture where death is concerned. Thus it quotes Romans 6:23 “The wages of sin is (spiritual) death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” We see this addition to the Word in numerous publications, in sermons and in so-called “true to the Bible” Sunday School literature. But what do they mean by “spiritual” death? Does this mean that at the judgment man’s spirit dies, but his body continues to function? Certainly without the spirit the body would be dead. Others go another step in adding to the Word and explain death as “separation from God.” Thus the wages of sin is life, although separated from God. But the sinner is already separated from God, “Separate from Christ...without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). Those who have not been regenerated by their salvation in

Christ are already considered to be spiritually dead, dead in trespasses and sins. Obviously the condemnation promised is more than this. Jesus clarifies it by saying that God "is able to destroy both body and being in Gehenna." This is called the second death, the death in the lake of fire. The first death is only temporary, as all dead will be raised up from the grave at Christ's coming, but the second death is final and eternal. Indeed, it is separation from God, and also separation from life.

A BIBLE PICTURE. Many people will not accept any doctrine that is held by some group which is in gross error on other things. Because some cults teach "soul sleeping" there are many who refuse to consider death as "sleep," even though this is the picture given in Scripture. Acts 7:60 tells us that Stephen "fell asleep." Paul used the term regarding the dead Christians: "but some are fallen asleep" (I Cor. 15:6), "also which are fallen asleep in Christ" (I Cor. 15:18), "them which are asleep" (I Thess. 4:15), "we shall not all sleep" (I Cor. 15:51), "so them also which sleep in Jesus" (I Thess. 4:14), "the first-fruits of them that slept" (I Cor. 15:20). Jesus pictured death as sleep: "Our friend Lazarus sleeps" (John 11:11), and Peter speaks of the dead as asleep: "since the father fell asleep" (II Peter 3:4).

Since the dead are pictured as asleep, the Psalmist reminds us that "in death there is no remembrance of (God)" (Psa. 6:5). "The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence" (Psa. 115:17). It is in resurrection from the dead that the Christians will glorify Christ and enjoy life in His likeness (II Thess. 1:10, I John 3:2).

That the dead do not ascend to their heavenly reward is clear innumerable scriptures. (John 14 does not teach that the dead saint goes immediately to the many mansions, but that he will be received at Christ's coming). On Pentecost 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" (Acts 2:29, 34). The point of Peter's argument is that the one who reigns at God's right hand is not David, but Jesus. If, upon David's death, he could ascend to heaven then he could be the one of whom the scripture spoke. But Peter argues that David did not ascend to heaven. Therefore, the prophecy of a King must apply to Jesus and not to David. (See John 3:13) Life is possible only by resurrection as demonstrated by Jesus.

CHRIST'S DEATH. Hebrews 2:14 tells us that it was necessary for Christ to become flesh and blood in order to suffer the death which man must suffer for sin. Death is not a mere transition, or a spiritual migration to another plain. When Jesus died, He "poured out his life unto death" (Isa. 53:12) in a blood-letting death. This is the "Good News." Man is mortal, and because of sin he dies, but if the penalty for his sin (death) is met by Christ's death, then Christ will raise him up from death and give him immortality. In the meantime, have no fear. No one can contact the dead, and the dead cannot come back to haunt anyone or give them messages. All of this is a hoax invented and performed by Satan through his angels. They can do mighty things, work great signs and wonders and convince millions, such as Bishop Pike or Norman Vincent Peale, that the dead are not dead and that they can be contacted. But the Bible tells how the mediums work. "They are the spirits of devils, working miracles" (Rev. 16:14).

The Christian's death is a blessed rest. The next conscious moment for him will be the trumpet blast and the sound of Christ calling him forth from the dead. "God did not choose us to suffer his wrath, but to possess salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who

died for us in order that we might live together with him, whether we are alive or dead (Greek: 'sleep') when he comes" (I Thess. 5:9–10).

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