

# **LIFE: Only In Christ**

By

Curtis Dickinson

One of the most important tenets of the Christian faith – in fact the central event of our faith - has been reduced to a once-a-year observation, and thus the impact of what Christ accomplished is lessened, leaving room for myths that run counter to the profound truth emphasized by Jesus and the apostles.

Once a year most churches have “Easter” services, to celebrate Christ’s resurrection, often including elaborate programming and special event. Christ’s resurrection is made the subject of song and sermon. But for the next 51 Sundays one may hear very little about resurrection. Instead, one will hear about the requirements for going to heaven, or talk about an “afterlife” for an “immortal soul.” People that die are said to have been “called home.” Not only are such expressions not found in scripture, they actually run counter to what scripture teaches about resurrection.

Jesus’ resurrection makes him the “first-fruit of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). Sleep being the biblical metaphor for death, for as sleep is followed by an awakening, so death is followed by a resurrection. Jesus’ resurrection experience is a demonstration of what every Christian is to experience as the fulfillment of his hope of eternal life. Jesus repeatedly declared that the dead would be raised. “The hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves 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 damnation” (John 5:28-29). The main thrust of Paul’s preaching was the resurrection of the dead. He announced to the council of Jewish rulers, “I am on trial concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead” (Acts 23:6), and to the Judean governor, Felix, he declared that he had “hope toward God, which these also themselves (the Pharisees) look for, that there shall be a resurrection both of the just and unjust” (Acts 24:15).

In contrast to these declarations, it is a common idea, as often expressed by Billy Graham in his crusades, that man has an immortal soul inside of him, an entity that has life within itself that will never die, and what we generally recognize as death is only the death of the body, with the soul continuing to live, either in heaven or in hell. It follows from this teaching that if a person is not among those saved by Christ, then his soul will go on living forever in a state of condemnation. The expression of Jesus about “eternal punishment” then becomes punishment that never ends, rather than punishment that is eternal in its result (death). The ideas of this punishment are varied, as expressed in a recent article by Ralph Kinney Bennett: “We easily conjure folkloric pictures of hell-red devils, fire, pain and horror – but the greatest horror will be spending eternity in the absence of God” (Christian Standard, 4/03).

The scriptural teaching of resurrection, that of Christ and the future resurrection of the dead, is the opposite of the popular notions about life after death. Robert Hach said it well: “The doctrines of Heaven and Hell are derivatives of the Greek philosophical mythology which gradually undermined and eventually overturned the resurrection-hope of Jesus’ gospel of the kingdom of God in the Christian tradition. Belief in Heaven and Hell is made necessary not by any text of scripture itself but by a doctrine that must be read into both the Old and the New Testaments: Plato’s doctrine of the immortality of the soul.” (*Possession and Persuasion*, Xlibris Corp., 2001, pg. 134).

Plato, the Greek philosopher who shaped religious thinking some 300 years before Christ, held that the principle life in the body was an immortal soul. It was everlasting and would finally be set free at death. Most people, who believe in natural immortality and unashamedly acknowledge Plato as a champion of this view, are unaware of his opinions in other areas of life. For example, he advocated the establishment of pederasty by the state, and held that children should all be wards of the state. The vices embraced by Plato infected all of Greek society like a great national disease.

An ardent devotee of Plato was Plotinus, the philosopher of Rome who lived from about 205-270 A.D. Plato’s myths and the mysticism of Plotinus came into the church through Augustine and other Christian leaders who studied Plato rather than the Bible. We should remember that natural immortality, or soul-immortality, was the very thing which the serpent in Eden offered to Eve: “You shall not surely die...you shall be as gods” (Gen. 3:4). Paul wrote that only Christ has immortality (1 Tim.6:16) but that Christians may attain it in the day of resurrection (1 Cor. 15:53).

The word “soul” must be defined in keeping with its use in Genesis 2:7.”And Yahweh God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul” (Hebrew: *nephesh*, Greek LXX *psuche*). The moment he receives the breath of life man becomes a living soul. Man did not “receive” a living soul. Rather, he became a living soul. The whole man is soul, so that scripture speaks of people as souls (living souls). For example, in naming the sons of Leah, it says, “...these she bare unto Jacob, even sixteen souls” (Gen.46:18).

All animals, including man, are called “living souls” (Hebrew : *nephesh*, Greek: *psuche*) without any distinction (Gen. 1:20, 21, 24 and 30 applies to fish, sea-monsters, cattle, reptiles, land animals and birds, although most English translations try to evade this fact by other words, such as life, creature, etc. Nineteen more times in the O.T. are animals called living “souls” (*nephesh*) and once in the N.T., Rev. 8:9, – “and the third part of the creatures which were in the sea and had living “souls” (*psuche*) died.” Nowhere is there the least implication that these creatures are endowed with immortal life. So when the same two words, *nephesh* and *psuche*, applied to man 152 times in the O.T. and 16 times in the N.T., there is no warrant for a notion that man’s “living soul” survives death, whereas that of an animal does not.

At death it is the soul that dies. The breath of life returns to God, and will be restored to man when he is resurrected. The Greek *psuche* is used 105 times in the N.T., and most

often it refers to the life of the whole person. We read of Christ giving his *psuche* as a ransom, and the actual death of Christ's soul – *psuche*. Isaiah wrote that Jehovah would “make his (Christ's) soul (*nephesh*) an offering for sin,” (Isa .53:10) and that he “poured out his soul (*nephesh*) unto death.” (Isa. 53:12)

There is no place in scripture where one can find the teaching that man has an immortal soul. Rather, immortality, or everlasting life is promised only to those who become children of God through Christ. Of some 40 statements by our Lord and the apostles that speak of eternal or everlasting life, there is not one promise of life or existence after Judgment Day except life in or with Christ, i.e. the life conferred on the saints in the resurrection.

What, then, of all the rest? Jesus left no doubt as to the alternative to believing. In many passages of scripture the gift of eternal life to God's saints is contrasted with the alternative to those who believe not. For example: John 3: 16; 10:28, the alternative is to perish (Greek *opollumi*, destroyed). John 3:36 says that unbelievers “shall not see life” but God's wrath. Rom. 6:23 and 5:21 says it is death. Rom. 2:7 says it is God's indignation and wrath. Matt. 25:46 says it is everlasting punishment. This is a contrast between two divine actions, a gift of life to last forever versus. the sentence of death to last forever, not punishing but punishment.

The gift of eternal life promised by Jesus is only to those who believe in him. There is no hint of any other kind of life beyond Judgment Day for any one, not even for the Devil and his angels. Rather the words used in O.T. and N.T. for the unredeemed after that day are “destroyed,” “consumed,” “perished,” “vanished away,” “dead.” None of these can be considered synonyms of “separation from God” in perpetual torment in the lake of fire.

Jesus and the early Christians preached a resurrection from the dead as the great Christian hope, in contrast to all the pagan ideas of immortality, reincarnation, and other beliefs in an afterlife.

Paul wrote that Jesus brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Tim. 1:10). The world is still in darkness, blinded by the pagan teaching of Plato and the theological confusion produced by the creeds of the “ecumenical councils” of the dark ages. Like the Greek philosophers, most modern religions teach the immortality of the soul. The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures teach the resurrection of the dead. The two views are mutually exclusive and irreconcilable.

“But now has Christ been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of them that are asleep.”  
Hallelujah, and Amen.

.....  
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. XLIII, Number 5.  
.....