



My Bible School Lessons

Exploring the Word of God

Lesson #21: "Beyond Death"

SCRIPTURE READING: 1 CORINTHIANS 15

Memory Verse: "The dead know not any thing." Ecclesiastes 9:5.

If we properly approach the Bible, we will see that all its great doctrines run parallel to one another, and that there is no contradiction or confusion. This is accomplished by studying all Bible teaching on a given subject and then comparing subject with subject. Paul calls it "comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 *Corinthians* 2:13). We will do just that in this most important lesson. Remember, it was Christ who in the beginning created all things (*Ephesians* 3:9), and man is therefore dependent upon Christ for life (1 *John* 5: 12). When man sinned he forfeited his right to life, "for the wages of sin is death" (*Romans* 6:23). And it is "our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 *Timothy* 1:10). Thus, there is hope of everlasting life only in Christ (*John* 3:16).

1: WHO IS THE POSSESSOR OF IMMORTALITY?

The word, "immortal," occurs only once in the Bible, and refers to God.

1 Timothy 1:17: "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever."

The word, "immortality," is used only five times in the Bible. You will find it in I Timothy 6:15-16; Romans 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:10; and I Corinthians 15:51-54.

The saints of God receive immortality at the hour of resurrection, from the great Fountainhead of life, the divine Source of immortality. Said Paul:

1 Corinthians 15:22-23 "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming."

1 Corinthians 15:52-55 "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 corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 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. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

As you think back over your life and recall with what frequency the word, "immortality," has been used in funeral sermons and in religious conversation, is it not surprising to discover that this word is found but five times in the Bible? It never refers to man or any part of man's nature; but the clear, emphatic

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declaration is made that God "only hath immortality," We do not have it naturally or inherently. We are to seek for it, discover it in the gospel, and receive it as a reality at the second coming of Christ. It is only through Christ that any sinner has hope of immortality.

From the foregoing it is clear, then, that man is dependent utterly upon the Life-giver for an endless life, even as in the beginning he was dependent upon the Life-giver for life. Man is mortal, and "mortal" means "subject to death." Only God is immortal (1 *Timothy* 1:17; 1 *Timothy* 6:15-16); that is, "not subject to death."

Eternal life and immortality are not for those who neglect or reject Christ. Immortality is the crowning gift of the gospel, and is reserved only for sincere ones, who, as Paul said, "by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life" (*Romans* 2:7).

2: IS MAN ENDOWED WITH AN ETERNALLY CONSCIOUS SOUL?

In the beginning God made Adam, the first man, from the dust of the ground and gave him the breath of life. Then he became a living soul.

Genesis 2:7: "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" (Job 33:4).

The substantial part of man's body is composed of dust, as the Bible says, The simple statement is made that God breathed into his nostrils the "breath of life." Job said:

Job 27:3: "All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God ["breath which God gave," margin] is in my nostrils."

Then man became "a living soul." Note carefully that God did not breathe into man a living soul or endow him with a living soul, but He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. An electric light bulb, of itself, gives no light. But when an electric current is sent through its wiring, light is produced. Thus Adam's body, perfect as it was, could not perform any function or fulfill any purpose. So God switched on the current of life, and Adam then became a living, active, functioning soul. The living soul did not exist before Adam was made. And it was not breathed into Adam, but came as a result of the union of his body and the breath of life, or "the breath of the spirit of life," as it is called in one place, which we shall note in a moment.

Now, did the first man become an immortal or a mortal soul when his life began? The Hebrew and Greek words from which we translate our English words, "soul" and "spirit," are found some 1,700 times in the Bible, The word "soul," as used in the Bible, does not always have exactly the same meaning. The same holds true for the word, "spirit." We should therefore avoid being dogmatic on anyone definition.

Not one of the 1,700 appearances of these original words for "soul" and "Spirit" are said to be immortal, never dying, imperishable, indestructible, everlasting, eternal, or in possession of immortality.

Nor are the dead ever represented as being capable of a conscious existence apart from the body. Even the animals became living souls when the breath of life entered their bodies at creation. In *Genesis* 1:30, we read: "To every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life." The marginal rendering of "life" is "a living soul" In *Revelation* 16:3, the animals of the sea are called living souls. The original expression for "living soul" is *nepesh chayah*. This expression is used in *Genesis* 1:20-21, 24, in referring to the animals as "the moving creature that hath life," "every living creature," and "the living creature." Thus animals are called "living souls," or *nepesh chayah*. This is the identical expression used in *Genesis* 2: 7, when man became a

'living soul," or *nephesh chayyah*. At death, this breath leaves man. These words from Genesis, describing the destruction at the Flood, are illustrative:

Genesis 7:21-22: "All flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man: all in whose nostrils was the breath of life."

The marginal reading of Genesis 7:22 is "The breath of the spirit of life."

The question arises: Is man then a mere animal? No, indeed! Such a conclusion is entirely unwarranted. In your garden is a green-leafed bud bearing beautiful, blushing roses. Close by is an ugly weed. They are both of the vegetable kingdom, receive the same kind of sunshine and rain, and grow in identical soil. But no one calls a rose a weed or a weed a rose. The difference does not lie in the sunshine, soil, or rain, but in the plant organism. When God put life into Adam's organism He produced different results than when He put life into animal organisms.

As we have already suggested, an electric current passes into a light bulb filament, and we get light. It passes into the heavy coils of an electric heater, and heat is the chief product. The current is connected with an electric meter, and a revolving motion is the result. We get power. Whether we get light, heat, or power depends on what the current goes into. But it is the same current.

So when God breathed life into Adam, He was putting that life into the masterpiece of earthly creation. Said the psalmist, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (*Psalms* 139:14). Man was made only a "little lower than the angels" (*Psalms* 8:5). As poetically expressed by one writer, "What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason, how infinite in faculty! in form and movement, how expressive and admirable in action, how like an angel in apprehension, how like a god!"

3: WHAT TWO THINGS HAPPEN WHEN MAN DIES?

1. The body turns to dust again.

Genesis 3:19: "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Ecclesiastes 3:20).

2. The spirit (breath of life) returns to God.

Ecclesiastes 12:7: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."

All living creatures die the same way as man. Said the wise man:

Ecclesiastes 3:19: "That which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast" (Psalms 104:26-29).

When man was created, his body was first formed of dust. Then God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living, thinking, feeling, active being. God called him a living soul. He did not exist before.

When man dies, the simple opposite of the creative process takes place. Says the Bible, "His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (*Psalms* 146:4). The breath of the spirit of life of all men, good and bad, returns to God. God also takes back the breath of life from animals, as you have read. Solomon rejects the theory that man's spirit goes upward and a beast's spirit downward (*Ecclesiastes* 3:19-21).

4: IS MAN CONSCIOUS IN DEATH?

The Scripture is very clear on this question. Notice five points:

1. In that very day his thoughts perish.

Psalm 146:4: "His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish."

2. The dead know not anything.

Ecclesiastes 9:5: "The dead know not any thing."

3. Their feelings perish.

Ecclesiastes 9:6: "Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished."

4. The dead praise not the Lord.

Psalm 115:17: "The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence."

5. Death is like a sleep, Jesus said.

Read John 11:11-14.

Yes, the Scriptures are plain. When death comes, all thinking and feeling end. If they do not, the Bible is false and unreliable. Thinking and feeling did not exist before God breathed life into man, and they stop entirely when the man dies. When the electric current is turned off, the bulb is there, but light is gone. Thinking and feeling come as a result of the operation of the current of life in conjunction with the body and brain of man. When the body gets too much out of order or the current of life is turned off, or both, all thinking and feeling cease.

Who started the theory of the natural immortality of man, his soul, etc.? The Egyptians believed in the immortality of the soul, and passed the doctrine onto the Greeks and Romans, who in turn gave it to Christian churches. However, this belief in natural immortality did not originate with the Egyptians, but with the devil himself. God said, "Thou shalt surely die" (*Genesis 2: 17*). The devil said, "Ye shall not surely die" (*Genesis 3:4*). The devil deceived Eve and nearly the entire world. Countless millions live in fear, dread, superstition, and under religious tyranny because of the devil's lie and the multiplied horrible theories that have been built upon this original falsehood.

After man sinned, God removed him from the tree of life, lest he live forever (*Genesis 3:22-23*). God did not propose to have everlasting sinners.

In death there is no consciousness of the passing of time. When David is resurrected, it will seem but the next instant after he died "the twinkling of an eye," as it were. In the Bible, death is called "sleep" fifty-four times.

5: WHAT IS THE GATEWAY TO ETERNAL LIFE?

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with

them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord"
(2 Timothy 4:8; Acts 2:29-34).

According to the Scriptures, all the righteous go to heaven at one time. The voice of Jesus, at His second coming, will open the tomb of every saint, and with the righteous living they will be rewarded together. For the sleeping saints, then, the resurrection is the gateway to eternal life. But if, as some believe, death ushers one immediately into heaven or hell, why is there to be a resurrection? If, through the ages, the good have gone to heaven at death and the bad to hell, of what value would the resurrection be? If a man is already in hell, why liberate him and then thrust him back? There is no reason for the resurrection if people are rewarded at death.

Christ said He would receive His disciples unto Himself at His second coming (*John 14:1-3*). If they and all other good people who have died are already with Christ in heaven, then His teaching about His second coming becomes a farce. Are the saints coming from heaven back to their graves to rise and go to heaven again?

All the righteous will be rewarded at once. The living will not prevent (precede) the righteous dead (*1 Thessalonians 4:15-17*), and the righteous dead will not be rewarded before the righteous living (*Hebrews 11:13, 39-40*).

There are two resurrections: one at the beginning, the other at the close, of the millennium—the first, "the resurrection of life"; the second, "the resurrection of damnation" (*John 5:29*). We must decide in this life in which of these two resurrections we shall have a part. And our decision must be made before death.

2 Corinthians 6:2: "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

It is too late after death to decide. "They that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth" (*Isaiah 38:18*). The punishment of the wicked will be discussed in our next lesson. God created man with the intention that he should live forever. However, immortality was the possession he could have only after being tested. Man failed in the test. He accepted the words of Satan in preference to the words of God, and was led thereby into disobedience. Eve believed that she would not die, but rather would enter upon a higher plane of experience and become as the gods. How many millions have since been misled as she was, believing that death is not real at all, but just the gateway of release into a higher realm!

6: CAN THE DEAD COMMUNICATE WITH THE LIVING?

Here are three Bible facts that are so important as to be a matter of life and death!

1. The dead know nothing about their own children.

Job 14:21: "His sons come to honour, and he knoweth it not; and they are brought low, but he perceiveth it not of them."

2. The dead have no part in any earthly affairs whatever.

Ecclesiastes 9:6: "Neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun."

3. God condemns attempts to communicate with the dead.

Read Deuteronomy 18:9-12 carefully and prayerfully. The Bible says No to the question before us. Attempts to communicate with the dead are considered by God as delving into "abomination!" According to Bible prophecy, spiritism is to have a great revival in these last days, but it is not of God (1 Timothy 4: 1).

7: WHAT IS OUR ONLY HOPE?

Our only hope is in the resurrection and the coming of our Lord, for if the dead rise not, all who have died in Christ are perished. This is the studied conclusion of Paul:

1 Corinthians 15:16-19: "For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."

If it were God's plan to renew the life of the sleeping saints in any other way except the resurrection, Paul would not say that "then they. . which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." But Paul knew that the resurrection was the only gateway into eternity for all who had fallen under the cruel hand of death—so he concluded that the saints would either come forth in the resurrection or perish!

And so, dear friend, the resurrection at the return of Jesus is our only hope. And it is Christ who makes the resurrection to eternal life possible. He possesses immortality. Christ is the fountain of eternal life.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

"In the midst of Eden grew the tree of life, whose fruit had the power of perpetuating life. Had Adam remained obedient to God, he would have continued to enjoy free access to this tree and would have lived forever. But when he sinned he was cut off from partaking of the tree of life, and he became subject to death. The divine sentence, 'Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return,' points to the utter extinction of life.

"Immortality, promised to man on condition of obedience, had been forfeited by transgression. Adam could not transmit to his posterity that which he did not possess; and there could have been no hope for the fallen race had not God, by the sacrifice of His Son, brought immortality within their reach. While 'death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned,' Christ 'hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel' (Romans 5:12; 2 Timothy 1:10). And only through Christ can immortality be obtained. Said Jesus: 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life' (John 3:36). Every man may come into possession of this priceless blessing if he will comply with the conditions. All 'who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality,' will receive 'eternal life' (Romans 2:7).

"The only one who promised Adam life in disobedience was the great deceiver. And the declaration of the serpent to Eve in Eden-'Ye shall not surely die'-was the first sermon ever preached upon the immortality of the soul. Yet this declaration, resting solely upon the authority of Satan, is echoed from the pulpits of Christendom and is received by the majority of mankind as readily as it was received by our first parents. The divine sentence, 'The soul that sinneth, it shall die' (Ezekiel 18:20), is made to mean: The soul that sinneth, it shall not die, but live eternally. We cannot but wonder at the strange infatuation which renders men so credulous concerning the words of Satan and so unbelieving in regard to the words of God.

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"Had man after his fall been allowed free access to the tree of life, he would have lived forever, and thus sin would have been immortalized. But cherubim and a flaming sword kept 'the way of the tree of life' (Genesis 3:24), and not one of the family of Adam has been permitted to pass that barrier and partake of the life-giving fruit. Therefore there is not an immortal sinner.

"But after the Fall, Satan bade his angels make a special effort to inculcate the belief in man's natural immortality; and having induced the people to receive this error, they were to lead them on to conclude that the sinner would live in eternal misery. . Thus the archfiend clothes with his own attributes the Creator and Benefactor of mankind. . Satan is seeking to overcome men today. . by shaking their confidence in their Creator and leading them to doubt the wisdom of His government and the justice of His laws." *Great Controversy*, 532-534