

# LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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## DOES MAN HAVE AN IMMORTAL SOUL?

“The soul that sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4,20). “He poured out his soul unto death” (Isaiah 53:12). “Who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen nor can see (I Timothy 6:16).

Is what we as Christians believe about the soul important or does it make no difference? If we believe the soul is immortal then consider the harmful ramifications of this belief. First: It changes the Christian focus on the resurrection and the appearing of Christ to the coming of one's own death. Dr. Walter Martin, a noted Christian writer stated the orthodox Christianity belief in his book *The Kingdom of the Cults*: “The great hope of the believer, then, is the joy of personal union with the Lord, and this union, the Apostle Paul tells us, takes place at the death of the body.” The “great hope” of the Christian is not his union with the Lord at his own death; we are already united with Christ in the here and now (Romans 6:5), rather it is at the appearing of our Lord. “For what is our *hope* or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus *at his coming*?” (I Thess. 2:19). “Looking for the blessed *hope* and the *appearing* of our great God and our Savior, Christ Jesus” (Titus 2:13). When he *appears* we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And every one who has this *hope* fixed on him purifies himself (I John 3:2,3). It is stated in I Corinthians 15:26 that death is an enemy, the last enemy to be abolished. Death takes away life, it does not give life. Life is in resurrection, not death. Second: If the soul is immortal and lives on after death then the resurrection is of little value. Further if disembodied souls are able to live and enjoy the presence of God in heaven for eternity, then what is the need of a resurrection? Death and not resurrection becomes the hope of the Christian. Third: The immortality of the soul promotes the practice of communicating with the dead. Séances and “channeling” is a common practice in the world and many Christians are dabbling with the practice. Isaiah asks: “Should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?” (Isaiah 8:19).

The common belief is that man is made up of soul and body. Paul, however, states: “and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Thess. 5:23). This echoes the statement in Genesis 2:7: “Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” This means man does not “have” a soul, he “is” a soul who has a spirit. The French theologian and scientist Arthur C. Custance in *The Seed of the Woman* stated: “many attempts have been made to distinguish between the terms *soul* and *spirit* as used in the Bible. The simplest summary statement is expressed most effectively in the observation that man *has* a body and *has* a spirit and *is* a soul. In effect, the soul is the person, the individual, the whole man. Unfortunately theologians have not always respected this relationship and have spoken (and continue to speak) imprecisely, sometimes using the word *soul* where *spirit* is proper and sometimes *spirit* where the word *soul* would be more correct.”

Ever since the days of the early church the soul has been a matter of confusion and debate. In the days of the early church a heresy called Gnosticism had to be confronted by the Apostles. The Gnostics taught that the body was evil and the resurrection was simply a fantasy. To the Greeks the idea of a bodily resurrection was absurd. They called Paul a “babbler” (Acts 17:18). One of the main points in Paul's sermon in Acts 17 was the resurrection of the dead. He did not preach the immortality of the soul, rather the resurrection of the body. Paul taught that the Christian does not want to be “unclothed” but clothed upon that mortality might be swallowed up of life (II Cor. 5:2,3). In other words we do not want to be disembodied. (The Scriptures never speak of a soul without a body). The soul has no independent existence. The Scriptures do not speak of an “immortal soul”.

Here are some quotes from the “Church Fathers” (early Christian “Bishops” who lived and wrote in the early generations after the death of the Apostles) as quoted by David W. Bercot in *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*: “The soul is not in itself immortal but mortal. Yet it is possible for it not to die. If, indeed, it does not know the truth, it dies. It is dissolved with the body, but rises again at last at the end of the world with the body, receiving death by punishment in immortality. But, again, if it acquires the knowledge of God it does not die, although for a time it is dissolved.” (Tatian) “Some maintain that there is within the soul a natural substance, the spirit, which is different from it. How much firmer ground have you for believing that the soul and the spirit are actually one and the same, since you assign to them no difference.” (Tertullian) “It appears that the soul is something intermediate between the weak flesh and the willing spirit.” (Origen) “All souls are immortal, even those of the wicked.” (Clement of Alexandria). “The mind is nothing else than an apparatus or instrument of the soul. And the spirit is not another faculty separate from the soul, but is the soul itself when exercised in respiration” (Tertullian).

Fast forward to the present. Ais.com quotes from *The Handbook of Jewish Thought* the teaching of Rabbi Aryeh Kapla on the soul: “The soul is created at the beginning of time, and is stored in a celestial treasury until the time of birth. The disembodied soul is intensely aware of the physical surroundings of its body. This is especially true before the body is buried. The soul then literally mourns for its body for seven days. For the first 12 months after death, until the body decomposes, the soul has no permanent resting place and thus experiences acute disorientation. It therefore hovers over the body. During this time, the soul is aware of and identifies with the decomposition of the body.”

It is not surprising that there is confusion about the soul. It is not what the early church Fathers taught about the soul, or what a Jewish Rabbi might think that is important. Neither is what we have always believed as important as what the Scripture actually say. Paul states: “I do not want you to be uniformed, (ignorant KJV) about those who are asleep, that you do not grieve as the rest who have no hope” (I Thess. 4:13). The Scriptures teach that

man has an “inner man” (Eph. 3:16; Rom. 7:22) and an “outer man” (II Cor. 4:16). A correct translation of two words in I Cor. 2:14,15 tell us a lot about the soul and spirit. “But the natural man (soulish man) does not accept the things of the Spirit of God...he who is spiritual (spiritual man) appraises all things.” The “soulish” man is a “natural” man, that is, a fleshly man (because he has the spirit of the world) (ver 12). He is in touch only with things of the flesh and world. The “spiritual” man is in touch with God because he has the Spirit of God (ver 12). This shows us the soul is of the flesh and the spirit is of God. Our soul and body is the “outer man” and our spirit is the “inner man”. After translating these two words as “soulish” and “spiritual” N.T. Wright, noted English scholar, in his notable book *The Resurrection of the Son of God* comments on this passage by stating: “The ‘soulish’ person is one whose life is determined by the ‘present age’ animated merely by the ordinary soul that everyone has. The ‘spiritual’ person is one in whose heart and mind the living God has worked by the Spirit so that they understand the strange new truths of the new age.” Back to II Corinthians 4:16: The outer man is perishing and the inner man is being renewed day by day. This means the soul along with the body is perishing, but our spirit is being renewed day by day. The soul as well as the body can be destroyed (Matt. 10:28). If when God “breathed into man’s nostrils the breath (spirit) of life and man became a living soul” then if that “breath of life” (spirit) is taken away then man is no longer a living soul. James tells us: “the body without the spirit is dead” (James 2:26). The person then is not a living soul because the spirit has left the body. “The dust (body) will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it” (Ecc. 12:7). It is the spirit, not the soul that returns to God. With such popular lights as Billy Graham, David Jeremiah, Charles Stanley and a host of other preacher personalities telling us that the soul and the spirit are the same it is hard to convince people that man is not soul and body, but spirit, soul and body. Hebrews 4:12 shows that the word of God divides soul and spirit, something most preachers do not do.

Let’s turn to the subject of “soul-sleeping”. The word *soul-sleeping* is a misnomer. Of course there is no such thing as the soul sleeping. However it is a term used by those who believe the soul is immortal and is not a part of the “outer man” which is perishing. Anyone that believes it is the soul and not the spirit that “returns to God who gave it” says those who do not believe as they do is a “soul-sleeper”. It is not the soul that sleeps at death it is the person. Every time Jesus and the apostles speak of death they call it a “sleep”. The Old Testament when speaking of a person’s death always simply says “he died” or “he slept with his fathers”. My friend the late Curtis Dickinson wrote in his paper *The Witness*: “In 52 scriptures God chose to use the expression ‘sleep’ with reference to the death of man, both saved and lost: 41 passages in the Old Testament and 11 in the New. All these passages refer to the whole person, and not just the body, as being asleep in death, a sleep that continues until the day that Christ descends and with a shout, the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, awakens all (both the saved and lost), to rise and meet the Lord.” Note these Scriptures: Dan. 12:2: “And many of those who *sleep* in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.” Matt. 27:52: “and the tombs were

opened, and many bodies of the saints, who had *fallen asleep*, were raised.” Luke 8:52,53: “Now they were weeping and lamenting for her; but he said, ‘stop weeping, for she has not died, but is *asleep*’ and they began laughing at him, knowing that she had died.” John 11:11-14: “Our friend Lazarus has *fallen asleep*; but I go that I may awaken him out of *sleep*.” Acts 7:60 (Stoning of Steven) “And having said this, he fell *asleep*.” I Cor. 15: ver 6: “After that he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have *fallen asleep*.” ver 18: “Then those also who have *fallen asleep* in Christ have perished.” ver 20: “But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are *asleep*.” ver 51: “Behold I show you a mystery, we shall not all *sleep* but we shall be changed.” I Thess. 4: ver 13: “We do not want you to be uniformed about those who are *asleep*.” ver 15: “We who are alive and remain at the coming of the Lord shall not precede those who have *fallen asleep*.” II Peter 3:4: “Since the Fathers *fell asleep* all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.” In spite of all these Scriptures if you believe death is a sleep you will be called a “Jehovah’s Witness” and a “soul sleeper”. In his monthly paper entitled *The Banner of Truth* the editor and chief writer Fred O. Blakely refutes the above Scriptures by saying sleep only refers to the body. He then points out other Scriptural pictures of death: II Cor 5:6-8: to be “absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” Phil. 1:21, 23: “I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and be with Christ.” Luke 23:43: “I say unto you, today shalt thou be with me in Paradise.” I Peter 3:18-20 Jesus went and “preached to the spirits in prison.” Luke 16:19-31: The story of the rich man and Lazarus. (I will discuss these Scriptures later) He then states concerning the death of the Christian: “As the natural body ‘sleeps’ in death, the released spirit exults in the Lord’s presence, and partakes of joys beyond our present ability to conceive. In death the saint’s spirit goes to the intermediate state of Paradise where it has a disembodied relationship with Christ and spirits of the saved. Although this is far superior to anything known here by the spirits of the brethren, it still is not the ultimate of joy which God has provided for his children. Man disembodied is only part of man.” This quote sounds good and is the belief of many Christians, but it has no bases in Scripture. He cites neither chapter nor verse to back up what he says, perhaps because there is none. According to Blakely Christ is in Paradise along with disembodied spirits, not at the right hand of the Majesty on high. The Scriptures say nothing about an “intermediate state of the dead” where “disembodied spirits” go at death. Some will say “Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16:23) is Paradise. Anthony Buzzard in *What Happens When We Die?* makes the following point about paradise: “The paradise of Scripture is found not in the heart of the earth, but in the restored garden of Eden, which contains the tree of life ‘To him who overcomes, I will give to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God’ (Rev. 2:7; 22:2). No one would propose that the tree of life is growing in the realm of the dead”.

Now concerning the Scriptures mentioned above which seem to indicate that the soul leaves the body and immediately enters into the next life without resurrection. II Corinthians 5:8 states that “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord”. And Philippians 1:23 the Apostle says: “I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ...”

First we must consider the context of II Corinthians 5:8. Chapter five is connected in context with chapter four. A.W. Bullinger in *The Companion Bible* states: "It is little less than a crime for anyone to pick out certain words and frame them into a sentence, not only disregarding the scope and context, but ignoring the other words in the verse, and quote the words 'absent from the body, present with the Lord' with the view of dispensing with the hope of the resurrection (which is the subject of the whole passage) as though it were unnecessary; and as though 'present with the Lord' is obtainable without it." In the original text there is no chapter break between chapter 4 and chapter 5. What Paul says, then, in chapter five must be seen in the light of the subject he is discussing in chapter 4 which is stated in verse 14: "Knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you." Paul had written to these same people in I Corinthians 15 concerning the resurrection at the coming of Christ. The same language is used in II Cor. 5 that is used in I Cor. 15. Note: I Cor. 15:54: "But when this perishable will have *put on* the imperishable, and this mortal will have *put on* the immortality, then will come about the saying that is written 'Death is swallowed up in victory'." II Cor 5: 2, 4: "For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, longing to be *clothed* with our dwelling from heaven...For indeed while we are in this tent we groan being burdened not because we do not want to be *unclothed* but to be *clothed*, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." The word *put on* in I Corinthians 15 is the same word as *clothed* in II Corinthians 5. Further: I Cor. 15:54: "then will come about the saying that is written, 'Death is *swallowed up* in victory'." II Cor. 5:4: "We do not want to be *unclothed* but *clothed* in order that what is mortal may be *swallowed up* in life." I Corinthians 15 shows that being "absent from the body and present with Lord" takes place at the resurrection and not at death.

Philippians 1:23: "But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ." The key to understanding this passage is the phrase "depart and be with Christ." The way we should interpret scripture is to compare scripture with scripture. The Scriptures are their own best interpreters. Paul will not write one thing to one church and contradict it by writing something else to another church. In I Thessalonians 4:13-17 Paul says he does "not want you to be unformed about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope." He does not comfort them and tell them not to grieve because the souls of loved ones are enjoying conscious bliss with the Lord in heaven. Rather he explains that "those who have fallen asleep" will be resurrected from the dead at the resurrection when the Lord returns. He states that "if we believe that Jesus died and rose again. *Even so*, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus." The popular belief is that those whom "God will bring with Him" are the souls of those who have gone on to be with the Lord. Notice the words "*even so*". This connects "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again" with "God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus." That is, if we believe Jesus rose again, *even so*, in the very same way God brought him from the dead He will bring with him (Christ) by resurrection, those who are asleep in Jesus. This interpretation is proven by noting that the term "even so" is used to mean "in the same way" in other passages: John 3:14: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent

in the wilderness, *even so* must the Son of man be lifted up." John 5:21: "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, *even so* the Son also gives life to whom he wishes." Gal. 3:6: "*Even so* Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." John 5:26: "Just as the Father has life in Himself, *even so* He gave the Son also to have life in himself." Rom. 6:11: "...the life he lives, he lives to God, *even so* consider yourselves to be dead unto sin but alive to God." Verse 17 states that when the Lord descends from heaven "then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always *be with the Lord*." This expresses the fact that this is the way we get to be with the Lord, through resurrection at his coming. Paul's "desire to depart and be with Christ" (Phil. 1:23) would be realized in resurrection. When a person "departs" the next thing we know is the judgment (Heb. 9:27), and the judgment is in the last day (Acts 17:31).

Luke 23:43: "...I say unto you, today you shall be with me in Paradise." It seems to me the confusion of this passage is caused by the punctuation by the translators. The Greek text has basically no punctuation and it is a personal choice where the English translators put commas, paragraphs etc. George R. Berry, editor of *The Interliner Literal Translation* wrote: "there is no authority anywhere in the Greek text for punctuation." Joseph Rotherham in his *Translation of the New Testament* renders this text: "Verily, to thee I say this day, with me shalt thou be in paradise." He further paraphrases Jesus' answer: "Thou dost ask to be remembered then: verily thou art assured now. As on this day of my weakness and shame; thou hast faith to ask, I this day have authority to answer. Thou dost ask to be remembered when I come in my kingdom; thou shalt be remembered then and with distinguished favour; thou shalt be in my kingdom; shalt be with me in the very paradise of my kingdom, in the garden of the Lord." Replace the location of the comma in this passage and, to me, you have a clarification of the passage. The passage can legitimately be translated: "Truly I say unto you today, you shall be with me in Paradise." There are times in Scripture when for added emphasis the speaker says "I say to you *today*..." Deut 30:18: "I declare to you *today* that you shall perish." Jer.42:21 "So, I have told you *today*, but you have not obeyed the Lord your God." Acts 20:26: "therefore I testify to you *this day* that I am innocent of the blood of all men." It would appear that in the dying hour of the thief, today, I give you assurance that you will be with me in Paradise. By replacing the comma Jesus tells him on that day, in his dying hour, he would be in Paradise with him, but he doesn't say when. But where is the Paradise Jesus spoke of? There's a lot of disagreement among scholars concerning this question. Noted Greek scholar Henry Alford in *The Greek New Testament* states: "the word is used of the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8) and became the name of that part of Hades, the abode of the dead, where the souls of the righteous await the resurrection." Converted Jewish scholar Alfred Edersheim in *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* says: "it is that part of Hades in which the spirits of the righteous dwell till the resurrection." Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* agrees with the above definitions. W.E. Vine in *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* in commenting on Paradise as used in Luke 23:43 says: "Christ at his death, having committed his spirit to the Father, went immediately into

Heaven itself, the dwelling place of God.” From Bercot, quoted above: “Church Father” Hippolytus wrote: “Paradise did not belong to heaven, in truth, it is a locality in the east, and a secret place.” A common thought is that Paradise, being a part of Hades but separated by a “great gulf” was taken into heaven by Jesus when he ascended. Eph. 4:8, a quotation from Psalm 68:18 is cited to prove this. This, they say, shows how Paul could be “caught up” into Paradise (II Cor. 12:4). However if this is true then David was left behind; Acts 2:29,34 shows David has not yet ascended into Heaven. “Leading captivity captive” is simply showing that God has subdued his enemies. So where is Paradise? Rev. 2:7 and 22:2 shows where Paradise is.

I Peter 3:18-19: “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that he might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which he also went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which few, that is eight persons, were brought safely through the water.” What are “the spirits in prison”? Scripture does not use the word “spirits” to describe dead non-resurrected people. At death the spirit “returns to the God who gave it” (Ecc. 12:7; Psalm 146:4). Scripture does, however use the word to denote angelic beings (Heb. 1:7,14). In the Old Testament the term “sons of God” is used in reference to angels (Gen. 6:1-8; Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7). II Peter 2:4-5:9: “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment, and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly. . .the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.” The phrase “cast down to hell” is one word in the Greek text the word, “tartaroo” which means to “cast down to Tartarus. This is the only place in Scripture the word is used. Vine’s *Dictionary of the Greek Bible* states: “the verb tartaroo, translated ‘cast down to hell’ in II Peter 2:4 signifies to consign to Tartarus, which is neither Sheol nor Hades nor Hell, but the place where those angels whose special sin is referred to in that passage are confined ‘to be reserved unto judgment’, the region is described as pits of darkness.”

Jude 6,7: “And angels who did not keep their *own domain*, but abandoned their *proper abode*, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day. *Just as* Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example, in undergoing the punishment fire.” Jude speaks about the same rebellion as Peter and Genesis. Sometime during the times of Noah, angels “left their own habitation” and went after “strange flesh”, after the daughters of men. The result? They are now “reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.” (See I Corinthians 6:2,3 to find out who will be judging). This is the prison, the Tartarus that Peter speaks of. To these fallen spirits, fallen angels, spirits in prison, Jesus went and made proclamation. In I Peter 3:19 the probable reference is not to glad tidings but to the act of Christ after his resurrection in proclaiming his victory to fallen angelic beings. We are not told

what Jesus did during the forty days between his resurrection and ascension. It was not while his body was in the tomb because he had “given up his spirit” (Jn. 19:30) and the spirit returns to God who gave it (Ecc. 12:7). We conclude that when we read I Peter 3:19 that Jesus went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison, we should not read into it dead people living in a prison, without resurrection, and Jesus going to them to preach the good news. It is not about dead people (who exists outside the body) but about spirits, angelic beings in prison, in Tartarus, bound in everlasting chains of darkness because of what they did in the days of Noah, leaving their own habitation, giving themselves over to fornication and going after “strange flesh, after the daughters of men.” Their offspring were the Nephilim on the earth in those days (Genesis 6:4)

Luke 16:19-31: The rich man and Lazarus. This passage is usually said to prove the immortality of the soul. Some go to Hades and some to Paradise. Therefore it is not accepted as a parable but a reality. Some say it is not a parable because Jesus does not say it is a parable. Jesus never said that all the parables he spoke were “parables”. For example in Matthew 15:13,14 Jesus teaches about the blindness of the Pharisees and says nothing about a parable but in verse 15 Peter said “Explain the *parable* to us.” In Mark 7 Jesus teaches about the tradition of the elders and does not mention that his teaching is a parable, yet in verse 17, “His disciples questioned him about the *parable*.” In Luke 12:35-40 Jesus teaches about slaves being ready for the return of a master. He does not say it is a parable but in verse 41 Peter asks “Lord, are you addressing *this parable* to us, or to everyone else as well? Mark 4:34 states that “He was not speaking to them without parables, but he was explaining everything privately to his own disciples.”

The moral of this story is stated in verse 31: “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.” It was unbelieving Israel, especially the Pharisees and leaders, that did not listen to Moses and the Prophets. They are represented by the rich man because Israel was the most favored people on earth (Rom. 9:3-5). Lazarus, on the other hand, represents the Gentiles who were without help until the gospel was revealed (Eph. 2, 11, 12). The “crumbs from the rich man’s table and the dogs” is descriptive of how the Jews thought of the Gentiles (Matthew 15:21-28). Abraham’s bosom shows that the Gentiles became Children of Abraham and heirs of the promise, which the Jews claimed as being exclusively theirs (Gal. 3:26-29). The KJV translates the word *hades* as *hell* when the rich man died and lifted up his eyes in *hades* represents the fact that he died having no relation to Abraham, thus the unbelieving Jews were cut off from the covenant (Matt. 21:43); while the Gentiles were given Salvation (Rom. 11:11-15). The gulf between them is the division made by acceptance or rejection of Christ. To this day the Jews are in torment, weeping at the wailing wall in Jerusalem, weeping over the loss of their once exalted position.

One last story: Moses and Elijah appearing on the Mount of transfiguration. Does this not prove souls are alive after death? Note Matthew 17:9: When Jesus and the three disciples are descending the mountain Jesus says this was a *vision*. Jesus became part of the vision just as Isaiah did in Isaiah 6.

