

Can the Soul of Man Die?

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Question from a reader: "On reading the article regarding the eternal punishment of the wicked, it struck me that as the soul of man is undying, how is it that death will be the punishment of the wicked, since although dead, the soul was yet alive and conscious? Please explain in your next issue, as it seems perplexing."

Truly it does seem perplexing; but the difficulty will speedily disappear if we go about it in the right way. There is no difficulty whatever in the Scriptures; the difficulty comes in the attempt to reconcile the truth of the Bible with an impossible theory of human invention.

This question affords us an excellent opportunity to contrast the right and the wrong way of dealing with the Bible. The wrong way is to assume a certain thing, and then to become perplexed because the Bible does not agree with our assumption. Thus, the disciples had settled it in their minds that Christ would immediately overthrow the Roman dominion, and establish His own everlasting kingdom on this earth, and therefore when He spoke about His resurrection from the dead, they wondered what that expression could mean. They were perplexed, and were overwhelmed by the event; but they would have had no difficulty, and would not have been taken by surprise, if they had said: "He says that He is to die, and rise again the third day; therefore it is evident that we have not understood the Scriptures, and are mistaken in our ideas."

So in the question before us, the Bible says that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), and that the wicked "shall be punished with everlasting destruction." But you say, "How can this be, since the soul of man cannot die?" That is the wrong way. The right way would be to say: "Since the punishment of the wicked is death, and is to be eternal, even 'everlasting destruction,' it is evident that I have been mistaken in supposing that man is an undying creature, and that there is really no such thing as death."

You say that "the soul of man is undying." God says: "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20). "What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his life (soul) from the power of the grave?" (Psalm 89:48). The answer comes: "Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches, none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him— for the redemption of their souls is costly, and it shall cease forever." "But God will

redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me" (Psalm 49:6-8,15).

Here we have your question completely answered. The difficulty is solved, and the perplexity ought now to cease. *The only trouble was, that you assumed something that is contrary to the truth.*

How is it possible for anybody to say that there is no death? Surely one's own observation ought to convince him, even without the testimony of the Scriptures. That man is mortal, that death has come into the world by sin, is declared throughout the Bible; and we see it everywhere on earth.

To say that there is no death, is to deny the necessity for Christ's sacrifice; for we are told that He partook of man's nature, "that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14, 15). He tasted death for every man (Hebrews 2:9); and "the last enemy that will be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:26). He says, "For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (John 6:33). And again: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). To the unbelieving Jews He uttered this sorrowful reproach: "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life" (John 5:39, 40).

Christ did not come into this world for nothing. It was terrible need that called for so wondrous a sacrifice. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"(John 3:16). Without Christ, all men would perish. **The fact that He came for the sole purpose of giving life, shows that without Him there is nothing but death for man.**

Death is not the same thing as life. To say that the dead are alive and conscious is as absurd as to say that the blind see, that the dumb speak, or that the deaf hear. It is even worse than absurd; it is wicked; for it is not only a direct contradiction of the Bible, but it virtually teaches that there is no such thing as death, and that what is called sin is really righteousness. For it is declared that sin brought death. Romans 5:12. Being sinners we were dead (Ephesians 2:1), since death had passed upon all men: but if it were true

that death is the same thing as life, it would be evident that what the Bible calls sin is really the same as righteousness. **Thus we see that it is not a light thing to say that there is no death, since it really denies the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.**

“And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:46). The punishment we have already seen to be death—everlasting destruction. Now see how the statement that there is no death makes nonsense of the Scriptures: it would have Christ say that the wicked shall go away into everlasting life; but the righteous into everlasting life. It would make Rom. 6:23 say that the wages of sin is life, but the gift of God is eternal life. Of course professed Christians never think of the consequences of the false ideas that they have imbibed concerning death; for they could have no respect for the Scriptures, if they really thought that they contain such absurdities.

What does the Bible say about death, and the condition of the dead? Let us read a few statements.

“For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing” (Ecclesiastes 9:5). “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

“Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; In that very day his plans perish.” (Psalm 146:3, 4)

“For in death there is no remembrance of You; In the grave who will give You thanks?” (Psalm 6:5). “The dead do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down into silence” (Psalm 115:17).

“You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, For You have cast all my sins behind Your back. For Sheol cannot thank You, Death cannot praise You; Those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your truth. The living, the living man, he shall praise You, As I do this day; The father shall make known Your truth to the children” (Isaiah 38:17-19).

The case is very simple. Christ is “our life” (Colossians 3:4). In God “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). “In Him all things consist” (Colossians 1:17). In the beginning

“God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being (a living soul)” (Genesis 2:7). So we read, “The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life” (Job 33:4).

In Christ we live; without Him there is no existence. All mankind live by the same means by which the first man lived—by the breath of God. God is constantly doing for each one of us what He did for Adam in the beginning—breathing into our nostrils the **breath** of life; thus only is it that we are **living souls**. “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). The spirit and the breath are the same thing.

In the things that God has made, and which are for our use, the everlasting power and Divinity of God are clearly seen (Romans 1:20); and “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3). God gives Himself to us in His gifts. “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:11–12).

Now all men have the Son, the Word life, whether they know Him and accept Him, or not; for the free gift has come upon all men unto justification of life (Rom. 5:18), and the Word of life is in the mouth and heart of all men, in order that they may do it. Deuteronomy 30:11-14; Romans 10:6-9. **Thus all are without excuse; for they have not to go in search of eternal life, but only to lay hold of and keep that which has been committed to them.**

But not all will accept Christ, and yield to His control, even when they know Him. They say, “We will not have this Man to rule over us.” Nevertheless He is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, and therefore He does not immediately take them at their word, and leave them to themselves. Patiently and long He suffers their manners, drawing them to Himself by the cords of His everlasting love. Still many are obdurate, and will resist the Holy Spirit unto the end. Then at the last, when all God’s ways have been made plain to all mankind, and it still appears that men choose their own ways instead of His, God gives them over wholly to their own choice. They choose to live apart from the Lord; but Christ “ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things” (Ephesians 4:10); and when that is accomplished there will be no place in the universe for those who have fully and finally rejected Him. They will not have God to dwell in them, nor are they willing to abide in Him; therefore they will be

left to themselves, and **the result will be that they will cease to be, and will "be as though they had not been."** The breath that, joined to the body, made man a living soul, will depart, and then the soul will no longer live.

Can you not see that the Scriptural view shows the supremacy of God, while the idea that even the wicked who reject Him can have life independently of Him, makes them gods, self-existent beings the same as He is? But there is but one God,—the living God,—He alone is our dwelling place in all generations. We must either live in Him, or else not live at all. Just as apart from Christ we can do nothing, even so apart from Christ we cannot live. Righteousness is life, and both come from God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

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