

"Men and brethren let me freely speak to you of the patriarch David that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day... For David is not ascended into the heavens." Acts 2:29,34

LIFE OR DEATH

As students of the Bible, we have always tried to substantiate our personal beliefs from the never erring Word of God, rather than from human tradition, irrespective of how widely accepted or how personally pleasing or convenient a doctrine may be. The following is our research into an extremely popular traditional belief, held onto by both pagan and Christian religious systems and analyzing it to see if it can withstand the test of the word of God: "**It is written.**" The Bible warns "*Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men.*" Col 2:8.

In the beginning

"...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." Gen 2:7

The ancient Greek philosophers taught the philosophy that man is composed from two elements, an immortal soul which is good, and upon death was freed from the evil mortal body. The foremost advocate of this philosophy was Plato (428 - 348 B.C.), who was a pupil of Socrates. It was Socrates, together with Pythagoras, who were among the first Greeks who adopted this Egyptian belief on the nature of man. As the Encyclopedia Britannica summarizes:

"Traditional Western philosophy, starting with the ancient Greeks...shaped the basic western concepts of the soul."

The original view of ancient Jews was not in the immortality of the soul:

"The belief that the soul continues its existence after the dissolution of the body [i.e. after death] is a matter of philosophical or theological speculation rather than of simple faith, and is accordingly nowhere taught in the Holy Scripture. [...] The belief in the immortality of the soul came to the Jews from contact with Greek thought and chiefly through the philosophy of Plato, its principle exponent, who was led to it through Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries in which Babylonian and Egyptian views were strangely blended." *Jewish Encyclopedia, article, "Immortality of the Soul"*

Plato popularized the concept:

"The Egyptians were also the first that asserted that the soul of man is immortal ... This opinion, some among the Greeks have at different periods of time adopted as their own" *Euterpe, chapter 123, comments of Greek historian Herodotus*

"The soul whose inseparable attribute is life will never admit of life's opposite, death. Thus the soul is shown to be immortal, and since immortal, indestructible [...] Do we believe there is such a thing as death? To be sure. And is this anything but the separation of the soul and body? And being dead is the attainment of this separation, when the soul exists in herself and separate from

the body, and the body is parted from the soul. That is death [...] Death is merely the separation of soul and body." *Plato in The Phaedo*

The 2nd century Christians did not accept the pagan Greek concept of eternal life being inherent within man:

** Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1969, p. 281

"The ancient Church differs most of all from Hellenism in its belief in the Resurrection. Christian tradition affirmed the "Resurrection of the flesh," which the Apologists opposed to the Hellenistic doctrine of the "Immortality of the soul." The antithesis was conscious and intentional, for at no point so much as this was their opposition to the Hellenistic spirit felt by the early Christians. The Platonic, Hellenistic doctrine of the Immortality of the soul seemed to the Apologists a godless and blasphemous doctrine, which above all they must attack and destroy. (Justin, *Dial.* lxxx. 3-4) Their motto in this regard might well be Tatian's word: "Not Immortal, O Greeks, is the soul in itself, but mortal. Yet it is possible for it not to die." (Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos*, xiii. 1) "The difference between Christian and non-Christian in this matter was so great that belief in the "Resurrection of the flesh" could become a shibboleth. One who believes in the "Immortality of the soul" shows thereby that he is not a Christian. As Justin says: "If you have fallen in with some who are called Christians ... and who say that there is no resurrection of the dead, but that their souls, when they die, are taken to heaven; do not imagine that they are Christians." (*Dial.* lxxx.4)"

Here is an expansion of Justin's comments:

"If you have ever encountered any so-called Christians who do not admit this doctrine [of the Millennium], but dare to blaspheme the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob by asserting that there is no resurrection of the dead, but that their souls are taken up to heaven at the very moment of their death, do not consider them to be real Christians. [...] But I and every other completely orthodox Christian feel certain that their will be a resurrection of the flesh, followed by a thousand years in the rebuilt, embellished, and enlarged city of Jerusalem, as was announced by the prophets Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the others." Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, p. 80

However, Origen who was schooled in Hellenistic beliefs, advocated the soul doctrine. To accommodate it, he needed to re-interpret Revelation 20 which speaks explicitly of two resurrections, and the Millennium. In his schema the first resurrection became the equivalent of conversion and the return of Christ to establish the Millennium, (effectively) a fiction.

"I cannot show from Scripture that man is naturally immortal. I can only deduce it. The idea of the immortality of the soul has no source in the gospel; it comes, on the contrary, from the Platonists, and it is just when the second coming of Christ was denied in the Church, or at least began to be lost sight of, that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul came in to replace that of the resurrection. This was about the time of Origen." John Nelson Darby, leader among the Plymouth Brethren, *Lectures*, Vol IV

Origen openly confessed himself to be a true "Platonist, who believed in the immortality of the soul."

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"Souls are immortal, as God Himself is eternal and immortal." Origen, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol IV, pp. 314, 402

Tertullian shared Origen's views:

"For some things are known, even by nature: the immortality of the soul, for instance, is held by many. [...] I may use, therefore, the opinion of Plato, when he declares: 'Every soul is immortal'" Tertullian, *ibid*, vol III, p.547

The Bible makes it clear that man is composed of two elements: dust and breath. The dust was given life, or breath, and it became a living soul. Note that the dust was not given a soul, but it was given life! It is interesting to consider the first time in this world's history, when the notion of immortality apart from God arises, is when it was suggested to Eve by Lucifer. In reference to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil God had said

"...thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Gen 2:17.

"The serpent (Lucifer) said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as Gods,..." Gen 3:4,5.

"No, you don't really die, you keep on living, you just lose your temporary housing for your soul irrespective of whether you are saved or not." How many of us believe or have heard this? Well, we all know whose voice this is speaking to us. Now the point that Eve would be as a god is also worthy of noting, because God is the only self existing being in the universe,

"For as the Father has life in himself; so has he given to the Son to have life in himself;" John 5:26.

In other words, Lucifer was saying that Eve, too, would have life in herself. As we continue down this earth's history, let us see what some of God's servants wrote concerning the state of the dead.

"As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more. He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more." Job 7:9,10

How different this sounds from what we hear today of spirit manifestations ?

"For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks." Ps 6:5.

"Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." James 4:14.

"For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return," Gen 3:19.

"Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die and, return to their dust." Ps 104:29.

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

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Notice here that his thoughts perish (the dead person can no longer think).

"For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in anything that is done under the sun. ...Whatsoever thy hand findest to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" Ecc 9:5, 6, 10.

Not only can they not think, but their memory, feelings, knowledge, wisdom and all activity are gone. i.e. they are unconscious.

"The SOUL that sinneth, it shall die..." Eze 18:20.

NOTE it is the soul that dies.

Now some people will ask, how then do you explain all of this supernatural phenomena that is reported ? To answer, let us see what God says :

"For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world..." Rev 16:14.

"Now the spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." 1 Tim 3:1.

"And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness..." 2 Cor 11:14,15.

God was aware of this delusion and warns us:

"There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination (fortune telling, water dowsing, etc.) or an observer of times (astrology), or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer or a consulter with familiar spirits (automatic writing, ouiji board, clairvoyance), or a wizard, or a necromancer (those who conduct seances, or any attempted communication with the dead) for all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord." Deut 18:10-12.

"Regard not them that have familiar spirits (spirits of dead relatives), neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God." Lev 19:31

In the New Testament Christ tells us

"I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly." John 10:10.

"In Him was life; and the life was the light of men." John 1:4.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that who so ever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. " John 3:16.

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"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and he shall not come into condemnation; but has passed from death unto life." John 5:24.

"I am the resurrection and the life:..." John 11:25.

"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ,..." John 17:3.

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Rom 6:23.

"He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." 1 John 5:12.

From the preceding texts it is obvious that Jesus Christ came to save us from death and to give us eternal life (immortality). Now if it is true that our souls are already immortal, then Christ came for nothing because we already have life. The Bible teaches that in Christ we have life and that apart from Christ there is only death. More than this the Scripture tells us that ONLY Christ has immortality "*Who only hath immortality.*" 1 Tim 6:16.

We are told to "SEEK for... immortality, eternal life." Rom 2:7. Obviously, we do not have immortality and need to acquire it through having Christ live in us. Paul said

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. " Gal 2:20.
That is why Paul could look forward in faith to the resurrection with the hope of immortality.

"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." 1 Cor 15:52, 53.

The Bible teaches of two deaths (Rev 2:11 and Rev 20:14), and two resurrections (Rev 20). The first death the Bible presents as a sleep :

"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." Dan 12:2.

Christ also refers to the first death this way (John 11:11-14, Mat 9:24 and Mark 5:39), this was to differentiate it from the eternal (or second) death.

Those who believe the doctrine of the immortality of the soul can not believe the Bible teaching of the resurrection at the Second Coming of Christ, because what would be the point of bringing people back to life if they are already alive.

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope....For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first." 1 Thess 4:3,16.

Also those who believe the doctrine of the immortality of the soul have a problem understanding why Jesus would bring back Lazarus from supposed eternal bliss, to suffer as he saw his Lord crucified and to more sufferings as he would have seen his friends and family suffering.

These are not the only problems that arise; what kind of loving God would stand by and watch those who are not saved suffer in anguish for eternity. Also, the problem arises that Satan must be on God's permanent payroll as he will be employed to keep the eternal suffering going. If the wages of sin is death then how could a just, loving, holy God permit such things. The punishment given to the wicked is everlasting destruction (2 Thess 1:9), eternal death, NOT eternal suffering. To clarify this point lets turn to scripture again :

"Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an EXAMPLE, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." Jude 7

"And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly." 2 Peter 2:6

These cities were reduced to ashes as an example to the ungodly what eternal fire will do. These cities are not burning now. The fire was *everlasting*, but the cities were not. See Rev 14:11 where the smoke is said to go up "for ever and ever." The very same phrase, "for ever and ever" is used of the land of Idumea, which is not burning now, see Isa 34:10. (for another example of this see Jer 17:19-27, this fire "that shall not be quenched," was kindled when the Babylonians captured Jerusalem. See 2 Chron 36:14-19).

Malachi 4:1,3. says

"For behold the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts."

The wicked will be totally destroyed for ever, and nothing will be left of them.

We have seen that the concept of an immortal soul does not come from the Bible, but from pagan religions. It is a shame that these pagan teachings entered into the early Christian church through men such as Origen, Tertullian (155-220 A.D.) and Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.) who were Greek philosophers, or closely associated with Greek philosophy. As the Encyclopedia Britannica states, "*He (St. Augustine) fused the religion of the New Testament with the Platonic tradition of Greek philosophy.*"

God is not a God who wants to scare us into serving him, he does not terrify us into submission. The Bible tells us that God is a God of love, and he presents before us two options. We can either live eternally with him or we can cease to exist eternally, these are our only two options as there is no eternal life apart from God, for He is life. There is no intimidation on His part. We are

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given a time of probation to see if we would like to live with Him forever; if we chose not to, then there is nothing He can do more for us.

We turn our backs on the life He offers us, for which He has suffered so much to provide for us. What great love, that He lets us, His creatures choose to live without Him, and how much it must hurt Him when we choose rather to die than to live with Him. How would you feel if your son would rather die than be with you; would you torment him eternally for his choice?

By His Word he calls out to us "don't be deceived, Believe in me and be saved !"

He came to give us what we didn't have—eternal life.

Who do we put our trust in, the traditions of men, or the Word of God?