

Spirits of the Dead

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Do they
speak &
hear?

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I DO THEY SPEAK AND HEAR?

Alexander Bogomoletz, a Russian scientist, once said that a man should live to be at least 150 years of age. He actually prepared a serum that was designed to retard the aging process of the connective tissues of the body. Unfortunately, the learned doctor died at the age of 64, just 86 years short of the goal he had set for himself and for all mankind. And we still do not understand the mysteries of life and death.

No one has yet discovered the fountain of youth, and neither has anyone been through that veil of death to return and tell us what it is like on the other side. The only authentic information we have on this subject is found in the great book of God, the Bible. Here are unfolded the answers to questions which have troubled the hearts of men and women down through the ages. Piercing through the froth of human emotion and superstition, it will bring satisfying assurance for those who fear the future and who wonder what happens to the soul five minutes after death.

To introduce this subject, we must find the answer to one great, basic question. If we can answer it correctly, all the other questions about death and

the soul will open up like flowers in the sun. The really important issue is this: What kind of inherent nature does man possess? How did God create him? Does he have a mortal nature or an immortal nature? According to the dictionary, the word “mortal” means “subject to death,” and the word “immortal” means “not subject to death.” Simply stated then, we are asking whether God created man with a nature that could die or with the power of an endless life.

The answer to this significant question is found in Job 4:17, “Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his maker?” There is the word we are looking for! Man is mortal. He is subject to death. God did not make him without the capacity to deteriorate and die. The fact is, only God has that inherent power of eternal existence. He is immortal. And the only time that word is used in the Bible, it refers to God. “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Timothy 1:17).

The human family was not invested with a natural immortality. The Word of God assures us that God alone has that kind of nature. He is the author of life, the great source of all existence. From Him every other life in the universe has been derived. “King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only

hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen” (1 Timothy 6:15, 16).

At this point someone may raise another question about the subject of immortality. Is it possible that man has a mortal body but an immortal soul living in the tabernacle of flesh? Perhaps the “real” person is not the body at all but the undying soul-entity dwelling within the mortal body. We need not puzzle over this point, because it is concisely settled by a number of Bible texts.

2 THE SOUL CAN DIE

God said, through the prophet, “Behold, all souls are mine: as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4). This firmly establishes that the soul is definitely not immortal by nature, or it could not experience death. Since the word “immortal” means “not subject to death,” there could be no question of death for a soul possessing an innate immortality. At least ten other verses affirm exactly the same thing: the soul is not naturally immortal.

Jesus, the great Master Teacher, declared that the soul could die, in Matthew 10:28. "And fear not them which kill the body ... but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." By this clear statement, Christ places the matter beyond all question. The soul can die and will die in the fires of hell. Therefore, it cannot be immortal by nature.

This is shocking to a lot of people. The traditional position has been exactly the opposite of this. How upsetting it is to learn that in all the 1700 biblical occurrences of the words "soul" and "spirit" not once are they referred to as being immortal or undying.

Where, then, did the doctrine come from? Most of us have heard about the "soul that never dies" from our earliest years of childhood. One thing is certain: it did not originate in the Scriptures. The truth is that it came directly from pagan tradition and mythology. The ancient Chinese ancestor-worship was rooted in the belief that the soul did not die. Egyptian pyramid hieroglyphics reveal that the doctrine of a naturally immortal soul was basic to their worship of the sun god. In India, where I lived for years, the Hindus believe strongly in reincarnation and transmigration of the soul. Darkest African voodoo ceremonies are built around the concept of an undying soul.

There is not one text that supports such a teaching in the Christian Bible; nevertheless, the

Word does tell us how the doctrine got started and who preached the first sermon on the subject. Read Genesis 3:1-4, “Now the serpent was more subtile than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die.”

Please notice that somebody disagreed with God. The Creator had declared that sin would bring death, but Satan said the opposite, “You will not really die.” That was the first great-granddaddy lie that was ever told, and the one who told it has been trying to uphold it ever since. That original sermon on natural immortality has been repeated many times through the years, often by preachers and theologians who ought to know better. A few years ago the Reader’s Digest featured an article entitled “There Is No Death,” by one of America’s most popular Protestant ministers. The great preacher said exactly the same thing that the great deceiver said to Eve, “You don’t really die at all. It may seem like

death, but you really keep on living and know more afterward than you did before.”

Can that doctrine be dangerous? Indeed, it involves much more than just promulgating a false statement. The implications of this satanic teaching are far-reaching and eternal in consequence. Millions will be lost because they do not understand the truth about the nature of man. Deception on this point opens a door which can flood the life with darkness and actual demon control. The only protection we will ever have against this insidious danger is to know the truth about death and the soul.

3 THE SPIRIT RETURNS TO GOD

The clearest and most concise inspired definition of death was written by Solomon, “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

Immediately we are struck by the word “return.” After death everything seems to go back from whence it came. The dust returns to the earth from which it was taken, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. Death is just the opposite of creation.

It is easy for us to picture the process of bodily decay and decomposition. We understand very well

that the physical components of the body are the very same as the earth itself. When it is buried, the body reverts to the chemical elements of the ground from which the Creator took it in the beginning.

But what about the spirit which goes back to God? That is not so easy to understand. There is not a man in the world who can explain it with human wisdom. Nevertheless, many verses in the Bible throw light on this crucial point. James wrote, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:26). The word "spirit" has a marginal reference which reads, "or breath." This is very important. The actual root word in the Greek is "pneuma," a word which means "breath" or "air." We take our English word "pneumonia" from pneuma because it is a disease of the lungs, or of breathing. We have pneumatic tires, also derived from pneuma, because they have air in them. But that same Greek word "pneuma" also has another meaning. It means "spirit." For example, the Greek term for "Holy Spirit" is "Hagios pneumatos," "Holy Breath" or "Holy Spirit."

This brings us to a very interesting conclusion. The words "breath" and "spirit" are often used interchangeably in the Bible. Job said, "All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils" (Job 27:3). Now, it doesn't take a high degree

of intelligence to know that Job was describing the same thing by the words “breath” and “spirit” Man has only breath in his nostrils. In fact, that is what God breathed into man’s nostrils at the time of creation. “And 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” (Genesis 2:7).

Now the picture begins to clear up. When Solomon described the spirit returning to God, he had to be referring to the breath, because that was what God gave in the beginning, and therefore, it was the only thing that could now “return” to the One who gave it. The marginal note for Genesis 7:22 refers to the breath of life as “the breath of the spirit of life.”

The psalmist describes death in these words, “Thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created” (Psalm 104:29, 30). Here the order is reversed, and their breath returns to God at death. Solomon said the spirit returns. Here God gives the spirit to create, but Genesis says He gave the breath to create. It only makes sense when we understand that the two words are used interchangeably and mean the same thing.

Please take note that this “spirit of life” is not necessarily the same as the Holy Spirit, neither is the “breath of life” the same as the regular air we breathe. This breath or spirit is the special, life-giving power of God which makes the body a functioning organism. Read Genesis 2:7 again, and try to visualize the act of creation. “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground.” We have no difficulty with this. We can see that dead body, perfectly formed and containing the very elements necessary for life. But there was no life. The heart wasn’t beating. The blood was there, but it wasn’t flowing. The brain was there, but it wasn’t thinking.

Then God added one more thing to the body He had made. He “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7). Do not miss the significance of these words—they are often mis- construed. God did not put a soul into the body. He added only one thing—breath or spirit. Then, as a result of the body and breath uniting, man BECAME a soul.

Millions have accepted the false, tradition- al view that God put a soul into the body to create man. This is based entirely upon the common, erroneous doctrine of all non-Christian religions. In the Bible, except in poetical or allegorical usage, the soul does not go in and out of the body; neither does it

have an independent existence outside of the body. Because the Greek word “psuche,” meaning “life,” has sometimes been translated as “soul” in our King James Version, some have drawn wrong conclusions; but only because they apply a false definition to the word “soul.” Millions have been taught that the soul possesses a natural immortality, and every time they read or hear the word they assume something that is totally false and unbiblical. Not even one time in the Bible is the soul referred to as being immortal or undying.

The fact is, the soul is the conscious life which resulted when God added the breath or spirit to the body. A simple illustration will help us see this truth more clearly. Let us liken the body to a light bulb. The electric current flowing into that bulb represents the breath of life which God put into the body, and the light itself will represent the soul which man became after the breath joined the body. As we look at the shining light we see a perfect representation of the completed creation. Now we press the button and turn the light off. What has happened? The current has left the bulb, just as the breath leaves the body at death. Now where is the light? Did it go up into the electric socket? No, it simply ceased to exist when the current separated from the bulb. Then let us ask, where is the soul when the breath separates

from the body? There simply is no soul until, in the resurrection, God restores the breath of life to the body.

That should not sound so strange to us, now that we have discovered how everything “returns” at death to the way it was before. Before creation, man did not exist in some dis-embodied form. There was no personality, no conscious emotions before God added the breath to the body. At that moment man “became a living soul.” If the soul came to be as a result of that union, when does the soul cease to be? Surely as a result of the breaking of that union.

Suppose we have two things before us: boards and nails. We take a hammer and drive the nails into the boards, making a box. Now we have three things instead of two; we have boards, nails and a box. Later, we carefully pull out the nails and lay them down beside the boards. Again, we have only two things before us: boards and nails. What happened to the box? There is no box, because it requires the two things together to cause it to be.

In the same way God started with two things, the body and the spirit. When He put them together, the soul “became”—it came into being, it began to exist. At death, the wise man tells us, the spirit returns to God and the body returns to dust. And nowhere in the Bible are we told that any soul survives the body,

or continues to exist without a body. The soul, or the life, has no existence without the power of God residing in the body. At death that power is removed; it returns to God; and the state of that man is exactly what it was before the breath joined the body. That means no life, no consciousness and no personality.

Even animals are referred to as souls in the Bible, because they have the same power from God to make them live (Revelation 16:3). The wise man wrote, "For 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; ... All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again" (Ecclesiastes 3:19, 20). This does not mean, of course, that man and animals have the same ultimate end. There will be a resurrection and judgment for God's moral creatures, but life comes only from God, whether it be human or animal. And that life is often referred to in the Bible as the soul.

4 WHEN ARE THE RIGHTEOUS REWARDED?

With this background we are now prepared to see what actually happens to the person who dies. In Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, he made this strong statement about

David, who had been dead for over 1,000 years: “For David is not ascended into the heavens” (Acts 2:34). Now think of this for a moment. David had long ago departed this life, and though often wayward, had received the assurance of forgiveness and salvation. Why, then, was he not enjoying the bliss of heaven ten long centuries after his passing? The question is answered in verse 29 where Peter explains, “Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day.”

The inspired Peter said David was right out there in his grave, and had not yet ascended to heaven. How interesting! If the man after God’s own heart had not received his reward 1,000 years after death, what about all the other good people who had lived and died up to that time? They, also, were resting in their graves, awaiting the call of God in the resurrection.

Jesus assured the people of His day, “...thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:14). Again, He said, “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works” (Matthew 16:27). There is no equivocation here. In simple, direct language Jesus declared that no one would be rewarded until the resurrection

takes place at His second coming. This means that none of the righteous dead have gone to heaven so far. All are waiting in their graves for the judgment and the end of the world. Almost the last words of the Bible confirm this fact. “And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his works shall be” (Revelation 22:12). This last-day reward is further described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:53, “... and this mortal must put on immortality.” When does it happen? “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump” (Verse 52).

This settles the issue about the reward of the righteous without any question, but what about the wicked? When will they be punished for their sins? The amazing answer is found in 2 Peter 2:9, “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.” There it is! The wicked are reserved somewhere until the day of judgment arrives. Where are they reserved? Jesus answers the question, “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the 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).

Our Lord made it exceedingly plain that everyone would be reserved in their graves until called forth in the resurrection to receive either life or damnation. Not only is this good theology, it is also good sense. Obviously, no one can be punished until after they are judged. Justice demands that this be done. Even the most unjust earthly judge would be impeached for doing otherwise. Suppose a man came before the judge charged with stealing, and the judge said, "Put him away for ten years and then we will hear his case." No! No! That could never be! And would the judge of all the earth do so in dealing with the wicked? Never! The judgment would be a farce in such a case—it would have no meaning.

The wonderful message of the Bible is that both good and bad are sleeping in their graves until the resurrection day. At that time they are brought forth to face the judgment, after which punishments and rewards are assigned. Job said, "So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep. Oh that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come.

Thou shall call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands” (Job 14:12-15).

5 DEATH IS A SLEEP

In harmony with all the rest of the Bible, Job describes a period of unconscious sleep in the grave before awaking to receive his reward. It agrees with Daniel, who spoke of the coming of Christ in these words, “And at that time thy people shall be delivered ... 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” (Daniel 12:1, 2).

There is a reason that so many inspired writers speak of death as a sleep. It is a perfect description of the state of the dead. When a tired man lies down at night he is immediately wrapped in sleep. As far as he is concerned, the very next moment he is awakened by the rising sun. He is totally unconscious of anything that transpired while he slept. So it is with the sleep of death.

Lazarus had died. Jesus said to His disciples, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of

taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead” (John 11:11-14).

Here is a classic example of the true Bible teaching about death. Christ called death a sleep. Later, He stood by the rock-hewn sepulchre of His friend and cried out, “Lazarus, come forth!” He did not say, “Lazarus, come down.” Lazarus was not up in heaven, nor was he anywhere else, except inside the walls of his tomb. In response to the call of Jesus, he awoke from his sleep of death and walked out into the sunlight.

Many exaggerated tales have circulated about people who came back from the dead but this is the most authentic story on record. There is absolutely no doubt that Lazarus had been dead for four days. His sisters protested when Jesus ordered the stone to be rolled away from the door. Martha said, “... Lord, by this time he stinketh” (John 11:39).

Most modern accounts of patients who resuscitate from heart failure include dramatic recitals of glorious views of heaven. What did this righteous man have to say about his four days of death? Did he report celestial visions of heavenly reward? Not a word. He had been asleep, just as Jesus had indicated. It had been like a moment of oblivion.

By the way, what kind of unspeakable punishment would it have been to bring Lazarus

back into this dark world after being in the presence of God? Surely he would have begged not to return, had he truly been enjoying the rewards of the righteous. A resumption of earthly life would have been worse than the horror of hell in comparison to ninety-six hours in Paradise. Certainly our Lord would never have been guilty of playing such a trick on His friend Lazarus.

Why do we find it difficult to believe the simple terminology that Jesus used in describing death? Certainly we have no problem in understanding the nature of sleep. Suppose a man lies fast asleep on a park bench. So soundly does he sleep that he is totally unaware of the stealthy approach of an attacker. In another moment he lies dead in a pool of blood. Now, according to the popular view of death, this man who knew nothing while he was sleeping, suddenly knows everything as his soul leaves his body. But how could that be true? Jesus said death is a sleep. If the man knew nothing while sleeping, how could he know any more after death? Christ's words would have no meaning if we twist them to mean whatever we want to believe.

We are not left to wonder about the nature of this death-sleep. Many Bible writers give detailed explanations of what it is like. "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is

no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish” (Psalm 146:3, 4).

Out of all the puzzling aspects of death which could be discussed, the inspired writers most often talked about the unconscious nature of it. Never once do we find any of the exciting descriptions of life after death which mark the modern version of the doctrine. Theology has adopted its teaching directly from the pleasing forms of pagan worship. David said, “He returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.”

Solomon wrote, “For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, 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 findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest” (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6, 10).

If one deliberately tried to produce stronger words and expressions to support a totally dreamless sleep in death, he would be hard put to match these words of the wise man. Just suppose for a moment that the same forceful statements were made to assert

consciousness after death. In other words, suppose Solomon had said, “Their love, and their hatred, and their envy will continue., for there is work and knowledge and wisdom in the grave whither thou goest.” Such an unambiguous statement would rightly be the end of all debate on the subject. Who could argue with it?

But here is the incredible truth! Not only does the Bible contain no such statement, but it repeatedly declares the opposite! Yet people continue to believe only what they want to believe. Passing over the explicit verses given by numerous inspired authors, which tell the truth about death, multitudes blindly follow empty traditions learned from parents or pastor.

Again we read, “For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day” (Isaiah 38:18, 19). Would not the righteous dead praise God if they were ushered into heaven at their death? David repeats the same timeless truth, “The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence” (Psalm 115:17). “For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?” (Psalm 6:5).

6 Do the Dead Ever Return?

Why do so many resist the obvious import of these biblical statements? Strong traditional biases may be part of the answer, but there is much more involved. Many sincerely believe that they have physical, eye-witness proof that the dead do return. They have the witness of their own senses that they have actually conversed with departed loved ones. What can be said about these manifestations? They can give the place, date and hour when they were confronted by dead relatives or friends in exactly the same form as when they lived.

Shall we discount all such psychic appearances as mental aberrations of emotional, unstable individuals? Hardly. The fact is that forms do appear, and they have been verified countless times. But on the basis of the infallible Word of God we can categorically reject them as being the spirits of the dead. The dead cannot return; neither do they have any post mortem existence in any conscious, living form whatsoever.

Then who is appearing in these bodily forms and making lying claims in the name of the innocent dead? Who else but the father of lies who built his first deception around the issue of death? He boldly

contradicted God when he said to Eve, “Ye shall NOT surely die.” When death did follow, Satan tried to make the survivors believe it was only an illusion. By impersonating those who died, Satan has persuaded millions that he was right and God was wrong. Accepting the testimony of their eyes and ears above the testimony of the Bible, many have become expert in calling up the spirits in seances.

Often Satan exploits the grief of those who have lost relatives and tries to draw them into his spiritualistic snare by pretending to be their own special loved one. What an overwhelming delusion! Only those who have fortified their minds with the truths of the Bible will be able to stand against this type of attack.

Let me share with you an incredible example of Satan’s mode of operation. A dear friend of mine served for many years as a missionary in Africa. While he and his wife were living in an isolated mission station, their three-year-old daughter was struck down by a fatal tropical fever. They buried the little girl on a hillside across from their home. A few days after the funeral the mother was sitting in her kitchen when the door burst open, and her little daughter ran across the room to fling herself into her mother’s arms. Can you picture yourself under that

kind of traumatic horror? And to top it all, the little girl cried out, “Mommy, I’m not dead! I’m not dead!”

Fortunately, that mother knew the Bible truth about death, and God gave her the power to pray instantly for deliverance from that Satanic masquerade. When she called on the name of Jesus, the form disappeared.

Is this an exceptional case? Unfortunately, no. Experiences like this have been repeated over and over again. Doubtless there are some charlatans who create their own illusions, but we have to recognize that very often the prince of all evil is manipulating the minds of people by his supernatural expertise in deceit.

Think of the implications of this for a moment! Millions have literally submitted their lives to the control of demons believing that they were being advised by loving relatives. Can’t you see the monstrous irony of the situation? And can’t you see how easily Satan can even start controlling the lives of Christians who have not understood the true Bible teaching about death? The only safety for anyone is the Word of God. Yet the stage is set for the majority of Catholics and Protestants to be swept away by the final manifestation of Satanic power—all because they have been taught a lie about the state of the dead.

7 PUNISHMENT & REWARDS IN THE RESURRECTION

Consider how confusing it would be if rewards and punishments are now being applied. What purpose would be served by a resurrection? Why even have a resurrection? Obviously each soul would already have a determined fate, and the farce of some make-believe final judgment would be totally meaningless. All the pious assurances heard at funerals about loved ones in heaven are simply repetitions of Satan's first lie to the human family. The portrayal of imaginary, immaterial souls flying away from the body at death is not a source of comfort to grieving relatives. Paul described the time when the righteous dead will be with the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 4; 16- 18, and concluded with these words, "Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

Here is a perfect, inspired picture of true comfort, and we need to understand clearly what word Paul was referring to that would bring such comfort. The two previous verses give us the words, "For 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.”

Paul here describes without any limitation the way and means by which we go to be with the Lord. Don't overlook the word “so” in his statement. It means “in this way.” By that little word Paul precluded every other way of being with the Lord. When he described the coming of Jesus and the resurrection of the saints as being the manner and means of being with the Lord, he automatically excluded all other means of doing it. Then he admonishes us to “comfort one another with these words.”

I repeat that there can be no comfort in the pseudo-Christian concept that some invisible, intangible entity leaves the body at death to be punished or rewarded. Is it reassuring to believe that unsaved relatives are suffering the torment of unquenchable fire? Is there solace in the picture of loved ones looking down from heaven upon the heart-breaking circumstances of those left behind? No wonder Paul was so specific in describing the second advent of Jesus and resurrection as the only way anyone can be with the Lord after death and, incidentally, as the only way to be comforted at their departure.

Paul's magnificent declaration points up the glorious fact that death and the grave are not the end. There will be an awakening from the sleep of death. The righteous will receive the gift of immortality, but it will all happen "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 Corinthians 15:52, 53). Jesus said, "Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in the 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).

All the dead will rise to face the great decrees of the judgment. Whether they went to sleep 1,000 years ago, or five minutes before Jesus appears, it will seem as only a fraction of a second.

Some have questioned the way in which Christ can restore the broken, decayed bodies of all the deceased of past ages. Some were blown to bits in explosions, others were burned up in fires, and many went down into the depths of the sea. Will it be any problem for the mighty Creator of life to bring back every soul and restore each personality? None whatsoever. He who numbers the hairs of our

head and counts the sparrows in the sky will have no difficulty in restoring the identity of each individual.

We may not be able to understand the process, but we can believe in it anyway. There are many things, such as television and computers, which are mysteries to the average person who benefits from them, but that doesn't keep us from believing in them. If most of us are baffled by the complexity of common electronics, we should not expect to grasp the secrets of resurrection power. Nevertheless, we can have complete faith that God can and will restore life to all the dead.

8 THE THIEF ON THE CROSS

Now let us look at one of the chief objections which has been raised against the Bible doctrine of death and the soul. There are a few ambiguous texts which can be understood only as they are viewed in the light of all the other verses on the subject. One example of this is found in the experience of the thief on the cross. At first glance it seems that Jesus was telling the dying criminal that he would go to heaven on the very same day he died.

In the context, the thief asked Jesus, in the last moments of his life, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him,

Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:42, 43).

Does this contradict all the other verses we have read on this subject? It certainly sounds as though Jesus and the thief would go that very day into God’s presence. Let’s allow other texts to clear up the mystery. Three days after he spoke to the repentant thief, Jesus met Mary near the open tomb. As she fell to worship at His feet Jesus said, “Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20:17).

This statement of Jesus brings us to a puzzling enigma. If He had not yet gone to heaven, how could He have assured the thief three days earlier that they would go there together that same day? And please take note that Paradise and the Father’s throne are in the very same place. John said the tree of life was located “in the midst of the paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7). Then in Revelation 22:2 he explained that the tree overarched the river of life, which in turn, flowed out from the throne of God. This definitely places God’s presence in Paradise. Obviously, if Jesus had not gone to His Father by the time He was resurrected He could not have ascended on the day He died three days earlier.

This mystery is cleared quickly when we consider the context of Luke 23:43. We have to be aware that the original manuscripts of the Bible were written in one continuous line of script. There was no separation of words, sentences, verses, or chapters. In 1611 when the King James Version was translated, scholars separated the words, inserted punctuation marks, and divided the script into verses and chapters. These men were not inspired, although they generally did a tremendous work in their assigned task. By necessity they had to put in commas often to give meaning to the translated words. In Luke 23:43 they added a comma before the word “today,” which makes Jesus say, “Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

In this instance the comma should have been placed after the word “today” instead of before it. Then the sentence would read, “Verily I say unto thee today, Thou shalt be with me in paradise.” This would bring the record into perfect harmony with all the rest of the Bible.

In other words, Jesus was saying to the thief, “I give you the assurance today—when it seems that I can save no one, when my own disciples have forsaken me and I am dying as a condemned felon—I give you the assurance today that you will be with me in Paradise.”

Is this tampering with the sacred record? No. The translators were no more divinely inspired than we are. Only the original authors were inspired. Placing the comma after the word “today” is just as true to the original text as placing it before the word. The only difference is that one way brings total harmony in the scriptures and the other brings hopeless contradiction. It takes no supernatural insight to decide which place is correct for the comma.

Keep in mind that the thief was only asking to be remembered when Jesus came into His kingdom. He did not request any reward on that day of his approaching death. In the same vein, we find the great apostle to the Gentiles anticipating his departing this life, “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. HENCEFORTH there is LAID UP for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me AT THAT DAY: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love HIS APPEARING” (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Just as the receptive thief and the anointed Paul both focused their hope of eternal reward upon the coming of Christ’s kingdom, so may we also be remembered in that day.

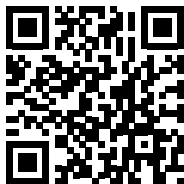


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