

[R1880 : page 240]

WHAT IS THE SOUL?

SOME one will possibly say, Ah! No one believes in the immortality of the body. Everybody knows that the body dies, that it needs resupply continually and that hence it cannot be immortal. But the Scriptures speak of *souls*. May it not be that the soul is indestructible? – that God having made a soul cannot destroy it?

We reply that it stands to reason, unless there be clear evidence to the contrary, that whoever can create is able also to destroy that which he created; and that which can be destroyed is not immortal. Now notice that the Scriptures nowhere speak of the immortality of the soul as some people seem to suppose – neither in the translations nor in the original text. Take a Concordance and try to find the expression "*immortal soul*," and thus you can quickly convince yourself that no such expression is found in the Scriptures. On the contrary, they declare that "God is able to destroy both soul and body;" and again, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." And in [R1880 : page 241] the previous article we saw that that which can die, which can be destroyed, is not immortal, is not proof against death, destruction.

Then comes that much misunderstood word *soul*, and the inquiry is, What is the soul?

The general idea of the soul is that it is an undefinable something in us (they know not what nor where), which is the real, intelligent being, while the body is merely its house or tool. A Methodist bishop once defined it as "a thing without interior or exterior, without body, shape or parts, of which you could put a million in a nutshell" – a very good definition of *nothing*, we should say!

Further, the body is not the soul, as some affirm: this is proved by our Lord's statement that "God is able to destroy *both* soul and body." And now, in view of the foregoing, if our minds be freed from

prejudice, we ought to be able to learn something on the subject by examining the inspired record of man's creation. Turning to Genesis 2:7, we read, –

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed [Heb. *blew*] into his nostrils the breath [Heb. *wind*] of life [Heb. "lives," plural – *i.e.*, such as was common to all living animals]; and man became a living soul [*i.e.*, a sentient being]."

The body was formed first, but it was not a man. It had eyes, but saw nothing; ears, but heard nothing; a mouth, but spoke nothing; a tongue, but no taste; nostrils, but no sense of smell; a heart, but it pulsated not; blood, but it was cold, lifeless; lungs, but they moved not. It was not a man, but a corpse, an inanimate body.

The second step in making man was to give vitality to the properly "formed" and in every way prepared body; and this is described by the words "blew into his nostrils the breath of life." When a healthy person has been drowned and animation is wholly suspended, resuscitation has, it is said, been effected by working the arms and thus the lungs as a bellows, and gradually establishing the breath in the nostrils. In Adam's case it of course required no labored effort on the part of the Creator to cause the perfect organism which he had made to breathe the life-giving oxygen of the atmosphere.

As the vitalizing breath entered, the lungs expanded, the blood corpuscles were oxygenized and passed to the heart as a pump in turn propelled them to every part of the body, awakening all the prepared, but hitherto dormant, nerves to sensation and energy. [please see R2489 where Z.W.T. Editor corrects the preceding sentence. – site Editor] In an instant the energy reached the brain, and thought, perception, reasoning, looking, touching, smelling, feeling and tasting commenced. That which was a lifeless human organism has become a man, a sentient being: the "living soul" condition mentioned in the text had been reached. In other words, the term "living soul" means neither more nor less than the term "sentient being" or "being capable of

sensation, perception." Moreover, even though Adam was perfect in his organism, it was necessary for him to *sustain* life by partaking of the fruits of the trees of life. And when he sinned, God drove him from the garden, "*lest* he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree [plural, *trees* or *grove*] of life, and eat, and *live forever* [i.e., by eating continuously]." (Gen. 3:22.) How the fogs and mysteries scatter before the light of truth which shines from God's Word!

Now we can see why it is that the Scriptures speak of "souls" in connection with the lower animals. They, as well as man, are sentient beings or creatures of intelligence, only of lower orders. They, as well as man, can see, hear, feel, taste and smell; and each can reason up to the standard of his organism, though, none as abstrusely nor on as high a plane as man. We read (Gen. 1:30) "To you it shall be for meat, and to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life [Heb. "*nephesh chayah*" – *a living soul*]. Again (Gen. 1:20) "Let the waters bring forth the moving creature that hath *life* [Heb. – a living soul]." – See marginal readings.

The same lesson, – that the life principle is no different in mankind from what it is in all other creatures whose breath is taken through the nostrils, as distinguishing them from fish, – is taught in the account of the destruction wrought by the Deluge. (Gen. 6:17; 7:15,22.) This is in full accord with King Solomon's statement that man and beast have "all one breath" [Heb. *ruach*, spirit of life] – one kind of life; and that "as the one dieth, so dieth the other." (Eccl. 3:19.) When he asks (Eccl. 3:21), "Who knoweth the spirit of man that [it] goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that [it] goeth downward to the earth?" he is controverting the heathen theory, which had begun to speculate even at that time, that man had some inherent thing or quality which would prevent his death, even when he seemed to die. The wise man challenges any proof, any *knowledge* to such effect. This challenge to others to produce proofs, or admit that they have no such knowledge, follows his statement of the subject in verses 19 and 20. The distinction

between man and beast is not in the kind of breath or life, but in that man has a *higher organism* than other animals; possessing moral and intellectual powers and qualities in the image or likeness of those possessed by the Creator, who has a still higher organism, of spirit, not of flesh. And, as already shown, man's hope for a future life lies not in his inherent powers, but in his Creator's gracious provision which centered in the redemption of every soul of man from death, by the great Redeemer, and the consequent provision that whosoever will may have everlasting life by *resurrection*, subject to the terms of the New Covenant.

Our Redeemer "poured out his soul [being] unto death," "he made his soul [being] an offering for sin" (Isa. 53:12,10); and it was the *souls* of Adam and his posterity that he thus bought with his precious blood – by making his soul (being) an offering for sin. Consequently it is the souls that are to be awakened, resurrected – not the bodies, which are buried and which go to dust.

Here is another common error – many suppose that the bodies buried are to be restored atom for atom, but, on the contrary, the Apostle declares, "Thou sowest [in death] not that body which shall be." In the resurrection God will give to each person (to each soul or sentient being) such a body as he pleases.* – 1 Cor. 15:37,38.

[*Inquire for further reading matter on Resurrection, if interested.*](#)

As the bringing together of an organism and the breath of life produced a sentient being or soul, so the dissolution of these, from any cause, puts an end to sentient being – stopping thoughts and feelings of every kind. The soul or sentient being ceases; the body returns to dust as it was; while the spirit or breath of life returns to God, who imparted it to Adam, and to his race through him. (Eccl. 12:7.) It returns to God in the sense that it is no longer amenable to human control, as in procreation, and can never be recovered except by divine power. Recognizing this fact, the Lord's instructed ones commit their hope of future life by resurrection to the Father and to Christ, his now exalted

representative. (Luke 23:46; [R1880 : page 242] Acts 7:59.) So, then, if God had made no provision for man's ransom and for a resurrection, death would be the end of all hope for humanity. – 1 Cor. 15:14-18.

But God has thus made provision for our re-living; and ever since he made known his gracious plan, those who speak and write intelligently upon the subject (for instance, the inspired Scripture writers) as if by common consent, speak of the unconscious interim between death and the resurrection morning as a "*sleep*." Indeed, the illustration is an excellent one; for the dead will be totally unconscious of the lapse of time, and the moment of awakening will seem to them like the next moment after the moment of their dissolution. For instance, we read that speaking of Lazarus' death our Lord said, "Our friend Lazarus *sleepeth*, I go that I may *awake him out of sleep*." Afterward, because the disciples were slow to comprehend, he said, "Lazarus is dead." (John 11:11.) Were the theory of consciousness in death correct, is it not remarkable that Lazarus gave no account of his experience during those four days? None will claim that he was in a "hell" of torment, for our Lord calls him his "friend;" and for the same reason if he had been in heavenly bliss our Lord would not have called him from it, for that would be an unfriendly act. But as our Lord expressed it, Lazarus *slept*, and he awakened him to life, to consciousness, to sentient being, and that as a favor greatly appreciated by Lazarus and his friends. [R1881 : page 242]

The thought pervades the Scriptures, that we are now in the Night as compared with the Morning of the resurrection. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." – Psa. 30:5.

The Apostles also frequently used this appropriate, hopeful and peaceful figure of speech. For instance, Luke says of Stephen, the first martyr, "*he fell asleep*;" and in recording Paul's speech at Antioch he used the same expression, "David *fell on sleep*." (Acts 7:60; 13:36.) Peter uses the same expression, saying (2 Pet. 3:4), "the fathers *fell*

asleep." And Paul used it time and again, as the following quotations show –

"If her husband be dead [Greek, *fall asleep*]" – 1 Cor. 7:39.

"The greater part remain unto this present, but some are *fallen asleep.*" – 1 Cor. 15:6.

"If there be no resurrection,...then they also which are *fallen asleep* in Christ are perished." – 1 Cor. 15:13-18.

"Christ is risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that *slept.*" – 1 Cor. 15:20.

"Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all *sleep.*" – 1 Cor. 15:51.

"I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them that *are asleep.*" – 1 Thes. 4:13.

"Them that *sleep* in Jesus, will God bring [from the dead] with [by] him." – 1 Thes. 4:14.

When the Kingdom, the resurrection time, comes, "we who are alive and remain unto the *presence* of the Lord shall not *precede* them that *are asleep.*" – 1 Thes. 4:15.

They "fell asleep" in peace, to await the Lord's day – the Day of Christ, the Millennial Day – fully persuaded that he [Christ] is able to keep that which they committed unto him against that day. (2 Tim. 1:12.) This same thought runs through the Old Testament as well – from the time that God first preached to Abraham the Gospel of a resurrection. The expression, "He slept with his fathers," is very common in the Old Testament. But Job puts the matter in very forcible language, saying, "Oh that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret until thy wrath be [over] past!" The present dying time is the time of God's wrath – the curse of death being

upon all, because of the original transgression. However, in due time the curse will be lifted and a blessing will come through the Redeemer to all the families of the earth; and so Job continues, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, until my change come; [then] thou shalt call (John 5:25) and I will answer thee; thou shalt have a desire unto the work of thine hands." (Job 14:14,15.) And we of the New Testament times read our Lord's response, "all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God [calling them to awake and come to a full knowledge of God and to a full opportunity of everlasting life]." – John 5:25,28.

BODY, SOUL AND SPIRIT.

That the terms body, soul and spirit are not identical and interchangeable as many assume is shown in the use of all three terms by the Apostle (1 Thes. 5:23), when he writes, "I pray God [that] your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless, unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." This prayer must be understood to apply to the Church as a whole – the elect church whose names are written in heaven. The true *spirit* has been preserved in the little flock. Its *body* is discernible today also, notwithstanding the multitudes of tares that would hide as well as choke it. And its *soul*, its activity, its intelligence, its sentient being, is in evidence everywhere, lifting up the standard for the people – the cross, the ransom.

In no other way could we apply the Apostle's words; for, however much people may differ respecting the preservation of the individual spirits and souls of God's people, all will agree that their bodies have *not been preserved*, but have returned to dust, like those of others.

"ALL LIVE UNTO HIM." – LUKE 20:37,38.

Our Lord in contradicting the Sadducees (who denied that there would be a resurrection or any future life) said that the *resurrection* (and hence a future life) was proved by the fact that God, in speaking to Moses, declared himself the God of Abraham,

Isaac and Jacob. Our Lord suggests that this of itself is a proof "that the dead are [to be] raised," because God would surely not refer thus to beings totally blotted out of existence. Our Lord then shows that God's plan for a resurrection is fixed, and that those whom men call "dead" "all live unto Him." God's Word, therefore, speaks of them as "asleep" and not as destroyed. In saying, "I am the God of Abraham," etc., he speaks not only of things past as still present, but also of things to come as if already come to pass. – Rom. 4:17.

SOME QUESTIONS WITH INSPIRED ANSWERS.

Question. Are the promises to the saints of the Gospel age heavenly or earthly promises?

Answer. "As we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." We are "partakers of the heavenly calling." – 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Tim. 4:18; Heb. 3:1; 6:4; Phil. 3:14; Eph. 2:6,7; 2 Thes. 1:11,12; 2 Tim. 1:9,10.

Question. Will the elect Church, the "overcomers," the "saints," continue to be human beings, "of the earth earthy?"

Answer. "God hath given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might become partakers of the *divine nature*" – "new creatures." – 2 Pet. 1:4; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 8:17,18. **[R1881 : page 243]**

Question. When will the full *change* (begun in us by a change of heart, called the begetting of the spirit) be completed? – When shall we be made like Christ our Lord?

Answer. "We [saints] shall all be *changed*."... "The dead [saints] shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be *changed*. In a moment, in a twinkling of an eye ...this mortal shall put on immortality." "Sown a natural [animal] body, it is raised a spiritual body." "Thus

is *the* [special] resurrection of *the* [special, elect] dead." – 1 Cor. 15:50-53,42-44; Phil. 3:10.

Question. Are full recompenses, either rewards or punishments, to be expected before the resurrection?

Answer. "Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." – Luke 14:14; Rev. 11:18; Matt. 16:27.

Question. What is the hope held out for all except the elect Church of the Gospel age?

Answer. "The whole [human] creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God [the saints]." Then shall follow "times of restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began," in which "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" through the elect "seed" of Abraham. – Rom. 8:22,19; Acts 3:19-21; Gal. 3:16,29.

Question. Are the dead conscious or unconscious?

Answer. "The dead know not anything." – Eccl. 9:5; Psa. 146:4; Isa. 38:18,19.

Question. Have the departed saints been praising the Lord all along during the past ages?

Answer. "The dead praise not the Lord." – Psa. 115:17; Eccl. 9:6; Psa. 6:5.

Question. Did the prophets receive their reward at death, or was it reserved in God's plan to be given them at the beginning of the Millennium, the age of judgment?

Answer. "The time of the *dead*, that they should be *judged*, and that thou shouldst GIVE REWARD unto thy servants the

PROPHETS," is at the beginning of the sounding of the last trumpet, the seventh trumpet, at the end of the Gospel age – Rev. 11:15,18; Psa. 17:15.

Question. Were the apostles promised translation to heaven at death?

Answer. "As I said to the Jews, Whither I go ye cannot come; so now I say TO YOU [apostles]." – John 13:33.

Question. Should the saints of the Gospel age, except such as are now living, expect to be *crowned* at death?

Answer. "When the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." – 1 Pet. 5:4; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 1:4,5.

Question. Did the Apostles expect glory at death, or at the second coming of Christ?

Answer. "When Christ who is our life shall appear, *then* shall ye also appear with him in glory." – Col. 3:4; 1 John 3:2.

Question. Were the saints to "*shine*" in death?

Answer. "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,...and they that be wise shall *shine* as the brightness of the firmament [as the sun]." – Dan. 12:2,3; Matt. 13:40-43.

Question. Did our Lord promise to receive his saints at death or at his second coming?

Answer. "I will come again and receive you unto myself." – John 14:3; Rom. 8:23.

Question. Were the ancient worthies rewarded at death?

Answer. "These all died in faith, **not** having received the promises;...that they without us should not be made perfect." – Heb. 11:13,39,40.

Question. David was one of the holy prophets: Was he rewarded by being taken to heaven?

Answer. "David is not ascended into the heavens." – Acts 2:34.

Question. How many had gone to heaven up to the time of our Lord's ascension?

Answer. "No man hath ascended up to heaven but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man." [R1882 : page 243] – John 3:13.

Question. Can he who created man destroy him? Can the soul be destroyed by its Creator?

Answer. "Fear him who is able to **destroy** both soul and body in Gehenna* [the Second death]." "He spared not their souls from death." "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." – Matt. 10:28; Psa. 78:50; Ezek. 18:4,20; Psa. 22:29; Joshua 10:35; Isa. 38:17; Psa. 56:13; 30:3; 119:175; Matt. 26:38; Isa. 53:10,12.

Concerning the character of Gehenna, see TOWER, Feb. '93.

Question. How great importance did the Apostle Paul attach to the doctrine of the resurrection?

Answer. "If there be no resurrection of the dead, then is not Christ risen....Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are **perished**." – 1 Cor. 15:13-18.

Question. Are the unjust now being tormented in some unknown hell? or do they always meet the full penalty of their unrighteousness in the present life?

Answer. "The Lord knoweth how to...reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment [the Millennial day] to be punished." – 2 Pet. 2:9; Job 21:30.

Question. What will be the end of those who when tried are found incorrigible, wilfully wicked?

Answer. They shall "go away into a cutting off from life," "be punished with everlasting destruction [a destruction which will never be terminated by a resurrection];" for still "The wages of sin is death," "the second death;" and still the gift of God, eternal life, is to be had only in Christ. "He that hath the Son hath life;" he that hath not the Son shall not receive that gift. – Rom. 6:23; Rev. 20:14,15; Matt. 25:46; 1 John 5:12; 2 Thes. 1:9.
