



Lesson 8

The Destiny of the Soul

Apologetics Press Intermediate Christian Evidences Correspondence Course

THE DESTINY OF THE SOUL

It is one thing to suggest that man possesses a soul. It is another to suggest that he receives such at conception. And it is still another to suggest that the soul survives the death of the physical body and lives forever in heaven or hell. Among those who accept the existence of the soul, there are some who are quite willing to believe that all men have such a spirit residing within them, but who are quite unwilling to believe that such is immortal, preferring to believe instead that this spiritual part is **purely temporal** (and thus lives only as long as our corporeal nature exists). However, in the previous lesson we learned that man does in fact possess an immortal soul (cf. Psalm 49:15; Matthew 10:28; 22:32; Revelation 6:9). To take the position that all men possess a soul that is purely temporal and incapable of surviving the physical death of the body is indefensible in light of the teachings found in the Bible.

Conversely, there are some who believe that all humans possess an immortal soul, but that the souls of **all people** (regardless of their actions on Earth) will survive the death of the physical body in order to ultimately inhabit the heavenly realm with God. Others believe that while all men do indeed possess a soul, **only the soul of the faithful child of God** has an immortal nature. That is to say, the souls of those who die outside of Christ are not immortal and perish when the body dies, while the soul of the Christian goes on into eternity. Still others believe that the souls of **both** the faithful child of God **and** the person outside of Christ are immortal—thereby surviving the death of the physical body in order to eventually inhabit either heaven (a place of eternal reward) or hell (a place of eternal punishment). Who is correct? What is the truth of the matter?

UNIVERSALISM

The idea that all humans possess an immortal soul, and that each and every one of those souls will survive the death of the physical body in order to inhabit the heavenly realm with God (regardless of their actions on Earth), is known as **universalism**. According to this view, all people will be saved; none will be lost. Advocates of this theory teach that since God is love (1 John 4:8), as well as a Sovereign Who desires mercy rather than sacrifice (Matthew 9:13), then divine punishment must be viewed as merely remedial. God's loving, longsuffering nature, they suggest, cannot tolerate the loss of even one of His creatures since He is "not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9).

When you stop to think about it, it should not be at all surprising that such a view should receive widespread support. After all, it is a most comforting position. Surely there is a twinge of desire in every human heart that would like to see everyone end up in heaven on the Day of Judgment. What an invigorating and refreshing belief—to entertain the hope that not a single human would lose his or her soul to the netherworld, but instead would walk the golden streets of heaven with God throughout eternity. However, in all honesty, it is impossible to interpret Jesus as teaching universalism. No amount of wishful thinking on our part will be able to avoid the force of Christ’s arguments, or those of His inspired writers, on the subject of the final destination of those who live in rebellion to Heaven’s will in the here and now. Theologian Leslie Woodson observed in this regard:

Generally speaking, there are two distinct views regarding the mechanics of ultimate, universal salvation. First, there is the idea that entails the “remedial suffering.” This theory simply transforms hell from the ultimate state of the lost into a means of grace. It is a place for a “second chance”—a fact brought to their attention by a little temporary “remedial suffering.” Second, there is the idea known as “transcendentalism.” This idea holds that “every soul is a part of the “oversoul” of the universe. To use a common metaphor, man is a spark of the universal flame and will eventually return to it to be absorbed into the One Soul of all time.... Hell, according to this nebulous theory, is a training school for fragments of the Eternal Self which must be disciplined into final merger. The soul of man is only a spark of the divine flame and will finally be reabsorbed into it (1973, p. 60).

In both views, “hell” becomes simply a “storehouse” of the souls of people who need either a brief period of disciplining/chastising to help them “shape up before they ship out” to the eternal joys of heaven. Such fanciful theories, of course, are not found within Scripture. Rather, they represent little more than wishful thinking on the part of those who, like universalists, hope to avoid the eternality of hell that is associated in the Bible with God’s divine mode, and term, of punishment. Anyone who suggests that repentance, reparation, and redemption are possible at some point **after death** (as both of these ideas plainly teach) simply does not understand the bulk of the Bible’s teaching on such matters. The writer of the book of Hebrews wrote: “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (9:27). The Lord Himself explained in Matthew 25:31-46 exactly what would happen to the wicked (whom He termed “goats,” as opposed to the righteous, whom He labeled “sheep”) on that great Judgment Day: “And these will go away into **everlasting punishment**, but the righteous into **eternal life**” (v. 46, emp. added). Not much comfort for the universalist in these passages, is there?

Universalism is an erroneous view that must be rejected, not only because it contradicts plain Bible teaching on the eternal fate of the wicked, but also because it makes a mockery of Christ’s commission to His followers (whether in His day or in ours) as presented in Matthew 28:19-20. His command was: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” But if everybody in the world is already saved, then Jesus’ commission is pointless. Why spend the time and effort teaching people about Christ if they do not need Him to go to heaven?

Suggesting that all men everywhere will be saved—regardless of the lives they lead or the obedience to God’s Word that they do or do not render—is equivalent to saying that Christ erred when He said that at His Second Coming He will “render unto every man according to his deeds” (Matthew 16:27). If universalism is true, Jesus likewise was mistaken when He taught that “every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37). Similarly, Paul was wrong when he reminded first-century Christians: “So then each of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12).

True, universalism is an “alluring theory”—no doubt due in large part to the fact that it stresses only the goodness of God and none of His other equally important traits. Paul, however, “shrank not from declaring the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Rather, he proclaimed: “Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off” (Romans 11:22). And from the beginning of the Old Testament (e.g., Deuteronomy 4:2) to the end of the New (e.g., Revelation 22:18), the injunctions against altering, adding to, or deleting from God’s Word are serious indeed. Universalism—as a doctrine that alters, adds to, and deletes from God’s Word—should be (in fact, must be!) rejected.

ANNIHILATION FOR THE WICKED/ ETERNITY IN HEAVEN FOR THE RIGHTEOUS?

It hardly should surprise or shock us that atheists, agnostics, and infidels of every stripe have long rejected the notion (associated with the concept of an immortal soul) of an unending penalty for wickedness. First, they reject the idea of the existence of the soul itself and, second, they find the idea of eternal punishment utterly abhorrent. But what about those who believe in God and who accept as genuine the existence of the soul? Some among that number believe that while all men do indeed possess a soul, **only the**

soul of the faithful child of God has an immortal nature. That is to say, the souls of those who die outside of Christ are not immortal and thus perish when the body dies, while the soul of the Christian goes into eternity (i.e., heaven). Others believe that the souls of **both** the faithful child of God **and** the person outside of Christ are immortal—thereby surviving the death of the physical body in order to eventually inhabit either a place of eternal reward (heaven) or a place of eternal punishment (hell). Which position is correct?

At the outset, we should acknowledge clear biblical instruction that **the soul of the faithful child of God will enjoy eternity forever in heaven.** Such a concept is established beyond doubt in both the Old and New Testaments. As early as the book of Genesis, we read that Abraham “was gathered to his people” (25:8). Obviously, this cannot mean that Abraham was buried with his ancestors since “his people” were buried in Ur of the Chaldees and in Haran. Abraham, on the other hand, was buried in the cave of Machpelah (25:9). The same words were used of Aaron (Numbers 20:24,26) and Moses (Numbers 27:13; 31:2; Deuteronomy 32:50). Certainly, in their individual cases this cannot possibly have reference to their interment in some sort of family tomb or burial plot. When David’s son (born as a result of his adultery with Bathsheba) died shortly after birth, the shattered sovereign said: “While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who can tell whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?’ But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me” (2 Samuel 12:22-23).

In His discussion with Martha concerning life after death, Jesus said: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25-26; cf. Revelation 6:9). That death is **not** total annihilation is also clear from the words of Christ in John 5:28-29: “The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth.” In Luke 8:55, the account is recorded of Christ raising Jairus’ daughter from the dead. The text reads as follows: “Then her spirit returned, and she arose immediately.” If her spirit had been annihilated, it hardly could have “returned.”

On one occasion during Jesus’ earthly ministry, He discussed the importance of the soul with His disciples when He said: “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36-37). Indeed, if the immortal nature of man is annihilated at the death of the body, what was Christ’s point? Would not a person benefit by exchanging “annihilation” for the “whole world”?

What did Christ mean, then, when He warned: “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28)? At the very least, this implies a transcendental reality that in some cases is independent of the body. The “destruction” of which Jesus spoke was described by the apostle John as the “second death.”

The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night **forever and ever**.... And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death (Revelation 20:10-14, emp. added).

The eternal nature of that second death is evident from John’s description of the wicked men who “shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God...shall be tormented with fire and brimstone...and the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night” (Revelation 14:10-11).

Furthermore, the position that **only** the souls of the faithful are immortal, while those of “lost mankind” are annihilated at their physical death, is both terribly wrong and squarely at odds with the teachings of God’s Word. The Scriptures plainly indicate that the disobedient are to be subjected to eternal punishment. In Matthew 25:46, Jesus said that the wicked would “go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” In his second epistle to the Christians at Thessalonica, Paul wrote specifically of “those who do not know God” and “do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” as those who “shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (1:8-9).

Additionally, the New Testament account (recorded in Luke 16) that describes Christ’s discussion of two men who died under different circumstances merits serious consideration here. One, Lazarus, went to Abraham’s bosom (a synonym for paradise). The other, an unnamed rich man, found himself in the portion of hades where, he exclaimed, “I am tormented in this flame” (16:22-24). Thus, the spirits of the two men, upon leaving their bodies, were alive, conscious, and even able to converse —although they were in two significantly different places. One was “comforted,” one was “tormented,” and a great gulf separated them (Luke 16:26). The simple fact of the matter is that Abraham’s spirit, Lazarus’ spirit, and the rich man’s spirit all continued to exist beyond the grave. That the rich man found himself in a place (and state) of torment demolishes the idea that the souls of the wicked do not survive this life. That the souls of the wicked endure torment “forever and ever” and “have no rest day or night” (Revelation 14:10-11) demolishes the idea that the souls of the wicked are annihilated at any point following the death of the physical body.

Furthermore, there are several other important points that practically leap off the pages of Scripture, and that need to be examined in this particular context. First, those who argue for the ultimate annihilation of the souls of the wicked apparently have failed to comprehend both the abominable, repulsive nature of man's sin against God and the inestimable price God paid to redeem rebellious man from its clutches. Second, they appear not to have grasped the necessity or purpose of punishment in God's grand plan. Third, they evidently have overlooked (or ignored) the straightforward teaching of the Scriptures on the eternal fate of the wicked. And fourth, they seem to have missed the telling fact that every single argument made against the existence of an eternal hell likewise can be leveled against the existence of an eternal heaven.

No Hell...No Heaven

When Christ spoke to the people of His day about the ultimate fate of humanity in eternity, He stated that the wicked would “go away into everlasting (*aionios*) punishment, but the righteous into eternal (*aionios*) life” (Matthew 25:46). As you can see, the Greek word rendered “eternal” is the same Greek word *aionios*, rendered as “everlasting.” The Lord's double use of the term *aionios* is critically important in this discussion. If the word conveys “eternity” for the reward of the righteous, then it also **must** convey “eternity” for the punishment of the wicked. There can be absolutely no doubt that the Lord intended to teach two specific, eternal states of conscious future existence. Therefore, “however long then the righteous will experience the blessedness of **eternal** life is just how long the wicked will suffer **everlasting** punishment...” (Denham, 1998, p. 615, emp. in orig.). Those who are willing to accept Christ's teaching on heaven should have no trouble whatsoever accepting His teaching on hell. Yet, sadly, some do.

CONCLUSION

The simple fact of the matter is that God created man as a living being who consists of both a body and a soul. Eventually man's **immortal** soul will inhabit either heaven or hell. No doubt that is exactly what John had in mind when he went on to say in Revelation 21: “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son” (vs. 7). God will be Father to the man or woman who demonstrates faith in Him, perseveres to the end, and lives in humble obedience to His divine will. Such is the promise of sonship to believers. God will welcome those who believe in and obey His Son as “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17), and will—according to His promise—bestow upon them all riches and blessings of heaven.

The simple fact of the matter, however, is that God created man as a dichotomous being who consists of both a body and a soul. When eventually each of us has “shuffled off this **mortal** coil” (to quote Shakespeare), our **immortal** soul will return to God Who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Infidelity, of course, always has objected strenuously to the concept of “life after death.” The very idea seems preposterous to unbelievers—just as it did to King Agrippa in the first century when Paul asked the pagan monarch: “Why is it judged incredible with you, if God doth raise the dead?” (Acts 26:8).

Indeed, why should it be difficult to believe that an omnipotent God could raise the dead? For the God Who created the Universe and everything in it in six days and Who upholds “all things by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:3), how difficult could it be to raise the dead? Herman J. Otten, long-time editor of *Christian News*, wrote: “The task will not be ours. Omnipotence and omniscience have assumed it; they will do it, and they will do it well” (1988, p. 40). Indeed, God will do His part well. Writing in the book of Revelation, the apostle John described in unforgettable language the destiny of the righteous when this world finally comes to an end: “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them” (21:3, RSV). Later in that chapter, however, John went on to paint a picture of stark contrast when he described the ultimate end of the impenitent wicked: “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (21:8). What diametric alternatives—eternal happiness as a son or daughter of God, or eternal pain in a lake of fire and brimstone!

The good news, of course, is that no one **has** to go to hell. When Christ was ransomed on our behalf (1 Timothy 2:6), He paid a debt He did not owe, and a debt we could not pay, so that we could live forever in the presence of our Creator (Matthew 25:46).

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Questions—Lesson 8

TRUE OR FALSE

DIRECTIONS: Write TRUE or FALSE in the blanks before the following statements.

- _____ 1. Everyone who accepts Christ's teaching on heaven also accepts His teaching on hell.
- _____ 2. Luke 16 teaches that the souls of the unrighteous will be annihilated after death.
- _____ 3. Only a few people will have to give an account of their lives to God.
- _____ 4. The Scriptures plainly indicate that the disobedient will live eternally in heaven.
- _____ 5. In Matthew 25:46, the words "eternal" and "everlasting" come from different Greek words.
- _____ 6. Some are predestined to go to hell.
- _____ 7. All men possess an immortal soul.
- _____ 8. Heaven and hell are both eternal in their duration.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Circle the correct answer(s).

1. What will happen to us after we die (cf. Hebrews 9:27; 2 Corinthians 5:10)?
- (a) All will go to heaven (b) All will be annihilated
(c) All will go to hell (d) All will be judged
2. Which of the following is the idea that all human souls will inhabit the heavenly realm with God (regardless of their actions on Earth)?
- (a) Unitarianism (b) Transcendentalism
(c) Modernism (d) Universalism

3. The righteous will live eternally in which one of the following places?
 (a) Earth (b) Hell (c) Torment (d) Heaven
4. The wicked will live eternally in which of the following places?
 (a) Earth (b) Hell (c) Paradise (d) Heaven
5. How many souls does God want to perish in Hell?
 (a) None (b) A few (c) 144,000 (d) All

FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. Hell is a place of eternal _____.
2. _____ makes a mockery of the Great Commission.
3. After he died, _____ found himself in Abraham's bosom (paradise).
4. Those who die _____ of Christ suffer eternal punishment.
5. The soul of the _____ child of God will enjoy eternity forever in heaven.

COMPLETE THE BIBLE VERSE (NEW KING JAMES VERSION)

1. Matthew 25:46: "And these will go away into _____ punishment, but the righteous into _____."
2. Revelation 21:7: "He who _____ shall inherit _____ things, and I will be his God and he shall be My _____."
3. Romans 11:22: "Therefore consider the goodness and _____ of God: on those who _____, severity; but toward you, _____, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off."
4. 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9: Those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel "shall be punished with _____ from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."

5. John 11:26: Jesus said, “_____ lives and believes in Me shall _____ die.”

NOTES/COMMENTS

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