

DAILY DOSE OF DOCTRINE

September 15-19, 2008



Sept. 15, 2008

Immortality of the Soul

“...God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honour and might forever. Amen.”¹

The teaching that human souls are immortal and indestructible actually has its roots in Greek philosophy. Although embraced by Christian theologians for centuries, it needs to be examined carefully in the light of Scripture.

First, it should be asserted that only God is immortal in the sense of it being “an original, eternal and necessary endowment”². Only God is and always will be, in and of himself. Angels and other created beings may live forever, but this ability conferred upon them by the Creator.

Secondly, while the Bible does not plainly teach that human souls are immortal, the majority of theologians believe that it is inferred...

- Because God has set ‘eternity in our hearts’³;
- In teachings on *sheol* as the abode of the dead in the Old Testament;
- In warnings against consulting the dead through mediums or occult practices⁴;
- In the promises regarding resurrection and the believers enjoyment of communion with God after death.

The Bible certainly teaches that it was God’s plan for human beings to live forever in the presence of God and that the atoning work of Christ makes this possible again by defeating death and giving eternal life as a gift. Does this mean that souls are naturally immortal? On this, Christians may differ.

¹ 1 Timothy 4:15a-16 (TNIV)

² L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 672.

³ Ecclesiastes 3:11

⁴ Lev. 19:31; 20:27; Deut. 18:11; Isaiah 8:19; 29:24

Sept. 16, 2008

Where are the Dead?

“(The criminal) said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’

Jesus answered him, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.’”¹

The Bible teaches that when Jesus returns, Christians who have died will be physically resurrected to new life.² But it also teaches that those who die are immediately received into the presence of God in heaven.³ So, where are the dead now?

The traditional view is that our souls go immediately to heaven. They dwell there in a spiritual state, enjoying paradise and waiting for the time of Christ’s return to earth⁴. At that point these souls will precede him to earth and be raised from the grave in resurrection bodies which will last forever.

Another explanation may be that, when we die, we ‘step into the future’. When we cross the threshold of death, do we also step out of the present time and immediately find ourselves at the Last Day? If so, we would experience the resurrection right away.

Whatever the explanation, those who have died in Christ are not ‘sleeping’ in their graves. They are safe in the presence of the risen Christ and we will be reunited with them when our earthly pilgrimage is over.

¹ Luke 23:42-43 (TNIV)

² 1 Thessalonians 4:16

³ 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23

⁴ “The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies.” WCC 32:1

“So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”¹

The Old Testament prophesied about the coming of the Christ or Messiah. It speaks of the coming of a great king, who will be a descendant of David, anointed by God, who will save Israel from its enemies and establish a world-wide reign, bringing peace and prosperity. At the same time, it speaks of him as a suffering servant who will be rejected and die on behalf of the nation.

We now understand that these prophecies allude to two ‘comings’ of the Christ. They were like two mountain peaks which from one viewpoint seem like one mountain, but from another vantage point are understood to be two, with a space between.

The first coming of the Christ took place in Bethlehem two thousand years ago. The divine Son came to earth, descended through Mary from King David. He established his Kingdom by his teachings and miracles and fulfilled the Messianic prophecies regarding the suffering Messiah.

But Jesus and his followers made it quite clear that he would return. When he comes again, it will not be as the meek suffering Christ, but as the King of kings. He will gather his own, judge the nations and end all suffering and death in the full realization of his kingdom.

¹ Hebrews 9:28 (TNIV)

Sept. 18, 2008 **Before His Coming**

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”¹

Jesus made it plain that no one knows the exact time of his coming and that we should be prepared for his return at any moment. However the New Testament also asserts that his return will be preceded by a number of great events. While scholars vary in their interpretations of the order and meaning of these events, at least four things will happen before Jesus returns.

1. ***The Calling of the Gentiles***

While the first disciples saw the Kingdom as something primarily for the Jews, Jesus taught that he had come to offer salvation to all the human race. Many passages indicate that Gentiles will respond in great numbers before the end of the age. In fact, Jesus stated that his coming would tarry until the good news as been offered to every race and nation.

2. ***The Conversion of Israel***

In the first century, the Church was primarily Jewish. However, with the destruction of Israel and the growth of the Church in the Roman Empire, Gentiles began to predominate. In contrast to centuries of alienation from Judaism by the Church, the Bible predicts that in the last days the Jewish people will respond to the gospel in great numbers². The restoration of the State of Israel is a great encouragement to believe that we are living in times of fulfilled prophecy.

¹ Matthew 24:14 (TNIV)

² Romans 11:25-29; 2 Corinthians 3:15-16

“For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.”¹

3. The Great Apostasy and Great Tribulation

Paul indicates that, in the last days, there will be a great falling away of the faithful.² The faith of many will grow cold and they will neglect their commitments to Christ. They will spurn sound teaching and gravitate to those who spin fables and tell them what they want to hear. Deception will be rampant, not merely in the world at large, but among those who claim to be Christians.

This distance from God will make the hardships of the Great Tribulation all the more difficult for many. Jesus spoke of wars, natural disasters, plagues and persecutions that would be experienced prior to his return. These events are described in symbolic, apocalyptic language in the Book of Revelation. While many interpretations of these prophecies abound, the message is clear. There will be a time of great suffering before Jesus comes again. As is usually the case with painful times, some will turn to God in surrender and hope and some will turn from him in bitterness and anger.

While Bible teachers disagree on whether Christians will go through any, some or all of the events of the seven years of the Great Tribulation, we should take hope in God’s love and his ability to care for us, regardless of the circumstances. Nothing can snatch us from his hand.

¹ Matthew 24:21-22 (TNIV)

² 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1-5