

Do You Have an Immortal Soul?

Most churches believe that we have an immortal soul that either goes to heaven or hell straight after we die or, in the case of the Catholic Church, possibly a third place called purgatory where sinners after death still have an opportunity for their sins to be purged and then go to heaven.

Do you believe in this and, if so, could you prove it from the Bible if you were challenged on it?

What happens to us after we die? Do we have an immortal soul that separates from the body at death? Is there a spirit part of us that continues to have a conscious existence as soon as we die?

What is a soul and is it immortal? In Genesis 2:7 we read the following: "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" (KJV).

When life entered Adam he became a soul. The Hebrew word that is translated soul everywhere it is found in the Old Testament is "nephesh". This Hebrew word is defined as "a breathing creature" in Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible.

In Genesis 1:21, 24, 2:19, 9:10, 12, 15 and 16 the same Hebrew word is used for animals but is translated as creature. It is translated as "dead body" or "the dead" in Leviticus 19:28, 21:1 and 22:4. If the soul leaves the body at death how could the dead body be called a soul? The Hebrew word translated as our English word soul is not separate from the body. It is the body!

In Ezekiel 18:4 we read, "Behold, all souls are Mine. The soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins shall die." The last sentence is repeated in Ezekiel 18:20 - "The soul who sins shall die."

So we have looked at the Old Testament word translated as soul. What about the New Testament. What does it have to say about the soul? The Greek word translated as soul in the New Testament is "psuche". Its meaning is identical to the Hebrew word "nephesh". It also means a breathing creature. It is used for animals in Revelation 8:9 and 16:3 where it is translated as creature.

In Matthew 10:28 Jesus said, "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."

When Jesus uses the word soul here He is referring to our life. Men can kill our body but God can renew our life by resurrecting us. He says to fear God who can terminate our life for the rest of eternity by wiping out any chance we have of a future resurrection. According to Jesus, the soul can be destroyed! It is not immortal.

Let's look at a few more verses in the New Testament. In Romans 6:23 we read: "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Eternal life is a gift from God NOT something that we automatically have. 1 John 3:15 says: "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."

In 1 Timothy 6:15-16 Paul says the following about Christ: "He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who ALONE has immortality." Of all who have been human only Christ has immortality.

In 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 Paul wrote: "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

At the resurrection we will PUT ON IMMORTALITY! What is the point of the resurrection anyway if we already have an immortal soul?

In Genesis 3:1-5 we read:

“Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'

“Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’”

Satan told Eve she would "not surely die" — in other words, she had an "immortal soul" that would live forever. This was the origin of the big lie that man has an immortal soul.

Let's look at the history of the immortal soul doctrine and just see how it came to be adopted as truth by mainstream Christianity:

Herodotus, the famous Greek historian who lived in the fifth century before Jesus, stated:

The Egyptians also were the first who asserted the doctrine 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)

The Jewish Encyclopedia states:

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 principal exponent, who was led to it through Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries in which Babylonian and Egyptian views were strangely blended (from article, "Immortality of the Soul").

It was through contact with Greece that the Jews came in contact with the belief of the immortal soul NOT through the Old Testament.

Origen, an early Catholic teacher in Alexandria, Egypt, combined the philosophy of Plato with certain parts of the Bible and called his philosophy neo-Platonism. Here is what Origen wrote around 200 AD:

Souls are immortal, as God Himself is eternal and immortal! He openly professed to be a true 'Platonist, who believed in the immortality of the soul' (Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. IV, pp. 314).

Just before the Protestant Reformation, the Lateran Council of 1513 issued this decree:

Whereas some have dared to assert concerning the nature of the reasonable soul that it is mortal, we, with the approbation of the sacred council, do condemn and reprobate all those who assert that the intellectual soul is mortal, seeing, according to the canon of Pope Clement V, that the soul is...immortal...and we decree that all who adhere to like erroneous assertions shall be shunned and punished as heretics.

Protestant Reformer Martin Luther did not conform with the Catholic teaching that the soul was immortal.

Luther held that the soul died with the body, and that God would hereafter raise both the one and the other (Historical View, p. 344).

William Tyndale, the printer of the first New Testament in English, wrote:

In putting departed souls in heaven, hell, or purgatory you destroy the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul prove the resurrection....

The true faith putteth the resurrection; the heathen philosophers, denying that, did put that souls did ever live....

If the soul be in heaven, tell me what cause is there for the resurrection?"

That's a very good question! The Protestant Reformers found the people unwilling to change their doctrines. Gradually, the Reformers themselves gave in to popular tradition which has its roots in pagan philosophy and speculation!

The Hebrew and Greek words translated as soul both refer to our temporary physical life. Are we wholly physical or is there something else that is a part of us that is spirit?

In Ecclesiastes 12:7 we read: "Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it."

In Job 32:8 we read: "There is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty gives them understanding".

In 1 Corinthians 2:11 we also read: "For who among men knows the things of a man except the spirit of man within him? So also no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

This spirit IN man is NOT a spirit person or being. It is not the MAN, but spirit essence IN the man. It is that non-physical component in the human brain that does not exist in the brain of animals that gives us emotional self-awareness and gives us mind power that animals do not have.

The spirit in man records what the brain comes to know and is like a sculptor's mold or a data disk recording that keeps a record of everything we are. At death our human spirit or "spirit in man" returns to God's great data library in heaven ready to be used again for the resurrection that both Jesus and Paul spoke about.

If it gives us our emotional self-awareness how do we know if it has any consciousness between our physical death and the resurrection?

In Ecclesiastes 9:5 we read: "For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing."

In Psalm 115:17 we read: "The dead do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down into silence."

And in Psalm 6:4-5 David wrote: "Return, O Lord, deliver me! Oh, save me for Your mercies' sake! For in death there is no remembrance of You."

Speaking of a dead man Job wrote, "His sons come to honor, and he does not know it; they are brought low, and he does not perceive it" (Job 14:21).

Daniel wrote: "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall AWAKE, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament" (Daniel 12:2-3).

There are many stories about ghosts which lead people into believing that some people continue to have a conscious state after they die.

One such incident is recorded in 1 Samuel 28. Against God's instructions (Leviticus 19:31), Saul went to a medium or witch to seek guidance. She seemed to conjure up someone who passed on a message to Saul. In verse 14 it says that "Saul perceived that it was Samuel." Samuel didn't see it. Only the witch saw the image and Saul guessed that it was Samuel. It seemed to look like Samuel but was it in light of all the verses we have read so far?

Satan and the demons will do anything in their power to deceive us (Revelation 12:9). In light of all the other verses plainly showing the dead know nothing between their death and the resurrection we would have to conclude that the "ghost" that Saul saw was a demon impersonating as Samuel and that "ghosts" are part of their deception plan.

Jesus used the term sleep for death after Lazarus died (John 11:11-14). Those who are dead have no consciousness like a sleep. At the resurrection the dead will be awakened from the sleep (unconsciousness) of death.

The spirit in man has no consciousness, by and of itself. We have no immortal soul. Immortality is a gift from God that He will give us if we have His Holy Spirit in us at the resurrection.