

Conditional Immortality of the Soul and the Teaching of the Scriptures

"*I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness*" (Psalm 17:15).

A common Christian belief is that "the soul lives in the body just as a man lives in a house." It is said at death the soul must leave the body and live somewhere else." Is this true? Where, in the Bible, is it said that "the soul of man leaves the body at death, and moves away to live somewhere else?" Where in the Bible can this doctrine be seen? **What is not taught in the Bible cannot be said to be a Bible doctrine.**

Paul says "*Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.*" (I Thess. 5:21).

The Bible teaches the soul (Heb. *nephesh*; Gr. *psuche*) is "*the animating principle of life manifested in the body as long as the body is alive.*" So that when a person dies, life ends. Death is the destruction of life. This is why death is an intrusion - an ugly, painful, unnatural intrusion - into our world of life (Rom. 6:23). The gospel is eternal life (John 3:16). Nobody lives forever except for those who trust Jesus Christ as Lord.

The Hebrew word *nephesh* used 752 times in the Old Testament. The corresponding Greek word i is *psuche* is used 105 times. These words refer to the *animating principle of life in both man and animals.*

Dr. John Parkhurst, says: "As a noun, *nephesh* has been supposed to signify the spiritual part of man, or what we commonly call his soul; I must confess that I can find no passage where it has undoubtedly this meaning." (Parkhurst Hebrew Lexicon, 5th ed.).

Dr. J. H. M'Culloh says: "There is no word in the Hebrew language that signifies either soul or spirit, in the technical sense in which we use the term as implying something distinct from the body." (J.H. M'Culloh, The Credibility of the Scriptures, Volume II, p. 471).

R. B. Girdlestone, in his Synonyms of the Old Testament, says: "The soul is, properly speaking, the animating principle of the body; and is the common property of man and beast. In other words, it is the life, whether of man or beast."

- (1) The Hebrew word for "soul" (*nephesh*) is used not only of man in **Genesis 2:7** but also of all the other living creatures mentioned in Genesis 1 and 2. The waters swarm with "*souls of life*" or "*living souls*" (Genesis 1:20), and God also created the sea monsters and all "*the creeping living souls*" with which the waters abound (Genesis 1:21). God also said that the earth should bring forth "*the living creature after his kind,*" or more literally, "*the souls of life after its kind.*" This included all of the animals from the stately creatures of the forest to the reptiles and worms of the soil (Genesis 1:24-25). The Creator calls them all "*living souls.*"
- (2) If it is argued from **Genesis 2:7** that *men* possess immortality, the same argument would apply to the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, and the fish of the sea; for they too are "*living souls*" possessing "*breath of lives.*" Although this writer does not know with certainty why they felt as they did, it should be mentioned that there are distinguished names which have encouraged a belief in animal immortality: Bishop Joseph Butler, John Wesley, Augustus Toplady, and St. Francis of Assisi. The latter preached to the birds (Cf. Augustus Hopkins Strong, Systematic Theology. Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1945, pp. 984-985).

(3) Hebrew word nephesh and its corresponding Greek word psuche may properly be reduced to mean (a). *life* of any living being, (b). any *living being*, (c). *the desire* of any living being.

(A). Verses where *nephesh* is “*life* of any being.”

In the OT *nephesh* is translated “*life*” 120 times, and in the NT *psuche* is translated “*life*” 40 times.

We have already seen Genesis 2. But there are many other verses referencing man and animals.

1. “Haman stood up to make request for his life [*nephesh*] to Esther the queen” (Esther 7:7).
2. “A righteous man regards the life [*nephesh*] of his beast” (Proverbs 12:10).
3. “All creatures that move along the ground - everything that has the breath of life” (Gen. 1:30).
4. “And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had *life* died” (Rev. 8:9). The word rendered *life* in Revelation 8:9 is *psuche*, the only word rendered *soul* in the NT.
5. “And it came to pass, as her soul [*nephesh*] was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni, but his father called him Benjamin” (Genesis 35:18 KJV). Notice how the ‘soul’ is actually *life*, as in “As *she breathed her last – for she was dying...*” (NIV).
6. “And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul [*nephesh*] come into him again. And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul [*nephesh*] of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother, and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth” (I Kings 17:21). This is the only verse in the entire Bible where the word ‘soul’ is said to depart and return. But if one is consistent with the rest of the Scripture, then it is “*life*” that leaves and returns.
7. “In whose hand is the life [*nephesh*] of every living thing” (Job 12:10).

SUMMARY: Soul is the principle of life in all living things including animals, plants and mankind.

(B). Verses where *nephesh* is “every living thing”

1. “And we were all in the ship, two hundred, three score and sixteen souls [*psuche*]. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat” (Acts 27:37).
2. “Every living thing [*psuche*] died in the sea” (Rev. 16:3).
3. “Every man they smote with the edge of the sword, until they had destroyed them; neither left they any to breathe” (Josh. 11:14). When *life* is taken away, man is said to be “destroyed.”

Unless the person is raised from the dead, *life* is over according to the Bible. This is why the Resurrection is the very thing that the pagan philosophers ‘laughed’ at on Mars Hill (Acts 17).

(C). Verses where *nephesh* is “desire or inclination.”

“The soul is seat of the senses, desires, affections, appetites, and passions” Grimms Lexicon.

1. “But the land whereunto they desire [*nephesh*] to return.” (Jeremiah 22:27)
2. “He uttered his mischievous desire” [*nephesh*] (Mic. 7:3).
3. “Don’t despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his soul [*nephesh*] when he is hungry” (Prov. 6:30).

How did belief in the “immortality of the soul” come to be accepted as “a fundamental doctrine of revealed religion” when there is nothing in the Bible that indicates the soul of man is immortal? It must be admitted that what is not taught in the Bible is not a Bible doctrine. When the history of this “doctrine” is carefully traced, it is found that Protestants copied it from the Papists, the Papists from the

Pagans and the Pagans from the devil, who said to Adam and Eve that they should not die, if they did disobey God. But when they were dead, and he was thus proved a liar, he invented a fabulous, mystical theory, which he persuaded the Pagans to adopt, and from the belief of which sprang the Pagan idol worship, and the other false religions. He caused them to believe that the "soul of man," which, according to the Bible, is the life of man, was the real, essential, intelligent man or ego, which continued to live in a conscious state, after the death of the body, and was immortal; and also persuaded them to worship the souls of the dead.

The Rise of Believe in Immortal Souls: Egypt, Greece, Catholics, and Evangelicals

George Rawlinson (1812-1902), English scholar, historian, Hebrew linguist writes:

'The Egyptians were... the first to broach the opinion that the soul of man is immortal, and that, when the body dies, the soul enters into the form of an animal, which is born at the moment, thence passing on from one animal into another, until the soul has circled through the forms of all the creatures which tenant the earth, the water, and the air; after which it enters again into a human frame, and is born anew. The whole period of the transmigrations is (they say) three thousand years. There are Greek writers... who have borrowed this doctrine from the Egyptians, and put it forward as their own" (Rawlinson's Herodotus, Vol. II., pp. 167-169, sec. 123).

George Stanley Faber (1773-1854), who wrote *Origin of Pagan Idolatry*, said something similar:

The Greeks and Romans believed in the pre-existence of souls, as well as their post-existence. The absolute immortality of the soul, passing, however, through a long series of different forms, is at once the doctrine taught in the Bghagavat-Gita (Hindu writings), in the traditions of the Celtic Druids, and in the books of the old Babylonians and Egyptians. (*Origin*, p. 141)

The worship of the stars, moon and sun are derived from soul separation:

"The gods of the Gentiles were allowed to have been the souls of their ancestors, and are described as having once acted a conspicuous part upon earth.... The souls of certain deified mortals were believed to have been elevated after their death to the orbs of the sun, the moon, the planets and the stars. Hence originated the notion that these celestial bodies... were each animated by a divine spirit." "The great father was... venerated in the sun." (*Origin*, p. 32)

The Roman Catholic Church, December 19, 1513, issued a Bull (Pope Leo X) against Tyndale, Luther and other priests who were reading the Scriptures for themselves denying inherent soul immortality: "We do condemn and reprobate all who assert that the intelligent soul is mortal"

The Westminster Confession says: "Upon death... the souls of men (which neither die nor sleep)... having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God." (Chapter 32, section 1).

What should we believe?

1. **Conditional immortality explains what man is:** The Bible says he is a creature formed from the dust of the ground into which God breathed the breath of life. The result of this creative action is "a living soul" or "a living being." Not an "immortal soul"! Nowhere is this expression found.
2. **Conditional immortality explains where man goes at death:** to be in the grave, in the dust of the earth – is often spoken of in the Scriptures as "sleep." Thus the Lord spoke candidly when he said

to David, "When thy days be fulfilled... thou shalt sleep with thy fathers" (2 Samuel 7:12), and when Stephen was stoned, it was said he "fell asleep" (Acts 7:60).

3. **Conditional immortality explains what the gospel is:** (Romans 3:23; John 3:16). The issue is life or death, the complete possession of life or the complete absence of life.
4. **Conditional immortality explains who God is:** He alone is immortal (I Timothy 6:16). He is love; He is just. He grants by His grace the gift of eternal life; and He justly punishes the wicked.
5. **Conditional immortality explains why Christ must return:** "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice" (John 5:28).