

LIFE AFTER DEATH

ARE THE DEAD STILL CONSCIOUS?

Part One

Most of us approach this subject with a previously established bias and tend to look for evidence to prove what we want to believe. Should we use the Bible in an attempt to prove what we believe, or should we believe what it proves? It has been well asked, *“Is something true because you believe it, or do you believe it because it’s true”?*

Words have meaning, but do your words mean the same as my words? Tweaking the meaning of a word is a favorite tactic of deceivers and is often done to support an esteemed belief or agenda. Therefore, a standard definition of commonly used words is essential for effective communication, so let’s go to our dictionaries.

Important English words defined

Truth: a verifiable, indisputable fact (Fact: actual, real and provable).

Life: animate existence, capable of functioning in a physical or spiritual state of being.

Death: the end of life, the total and permanent cessation of all vital functions of life.

Mortal: subject to death, either physical and/or spiritual, perishable.

Immortal: exempt from death; exempt from oblivion; imperishable, everlasting.

Perish: pass out of existence, decay, cease to be, come to an end.

Spirit: a life giving force; soul; the active presence of God in human life.

Spirit Being: a supernatural being. Not limited to the physical attributes of a mortal being. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6-8).

Sleep: a natural periodic suspension of consciousness; a state of being suggesting sleep as in death or coma (coma: state of deep unconsciousness, unable to communicate).

Vision: something seen in a dream, trance, or mental image, whether of supernatural or imaginative, of what is not actually present in space or time, as visions of the past or future -- Apparition.

Parable: a discourse conveying the intended meaning by a likeness of something comparable, but not the same.

Absolute: infallible, unambiguous, conclusive, unquestionable, faultless, complete, sovereign.

Hope: something desired, anticipated and waiting for but not yet obtained. Desire accompanied by expectation.

Paul summarizes our guidelines:

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (II Tim. 3:16). Can we accept Paul’s inspired statement or will we continue to believe Satan’s lie that we are “as gods” capable of determining for ourselves what’s true or false, or right or wrong?

GOD’S ABSOLUTES, OUR FOUNDATION

“Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him” (Prov. 30:5). “... the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple” (Ps 19:7). Are His absolutes consistent with His word? Consider the following 15 absolutes of God’s word.

1. God only has immortality

“The King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see” (I Tim. 6:15-16).

2. Man called mortal

“So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory” (I Cor. 15:54 Also see Job 4:17, Rom. 6:12; 8:11, II Cor. 4:11). Jesus explained to Nicodemus that flesh is flesh and spirit is spirit (John 3:6). Although promised, Mankind doesn’t have immortality yet. “... for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen. 3:19; Dan.12:2).

3. No man has ascended to heaven

“And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven” (John 3:13). *Not even David*; “For David is not ascended into the heavens” (Acts 2:34).

4. All men die and must be resurrected.

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12).

“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27).

Even David, “Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day” (Acts 2:29).

5. What the Bible says about death

“The dead *praise not* the LORD, neither any that go down into *silence*” (Ps. 115:17).

“For in death there is *no remembrance* of thee: in the grave *who* shall give thee thanks” (Ps. 6:5)?

“His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his *thoughts perish*” (Ps. 146:4).

“For the living know that they shall die: but the dead *know not anything*, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is *now perished*; neither have they anymore a portion for ever *in anything* that is done under the sun” (Eccl. 9:5-6). (Also see Isaiah38:18-19).

6. Death described as sleep

Following are a few of the many Bible verses describing death as sleep.

“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2). *If they are still conscious since death why must they then be awakened?*

“He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn” (Matt. 9:24). *They knew the maid was dead.*

“And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many” (Matt. 27:52-53).

“... Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. 12) Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. 13) Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. 14) Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead” (John 11-14).

It is significant that there is no biblical record of anyone who was brought back to life saying anything about being in paradise or being conscious of anything at all.

“For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption” (Acts 13:36).

For David, as with all who die, time for them has ended, but will begin again when he is resurrected. Could not the God who created life recreate it, or awaken the dead?

7. All to live again

“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, (*coming means not here yet*) in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done

good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28-29).

8. The first resurrection (spiritual)

Revelation 20:4-6 describes those of the first resurrection. “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power” (Rev. 20:6). They’re now spiritual beings.

9. The second resurrection (physical)

“But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished” (Rev. 20:5). Not the resurrection to sentencing, but rather to judging (Matt. 11:23-24).

“And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:” (Job 19:26 also see Ezekiel 37:1-14 and Matt. 10:15, 11:23-24). (*After 1000 years of Christ’s rule on earth*).

10. Some to die a second time

“He that overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death” (Rev. 2:11). (*They will be spiritual and immortal*).

“And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14-15).

“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake

which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8).

The second death is the resurrection to damnation spoken of in John 5:29; a physical resurrection. It is a sentencing to the lake of fire for whosoever was not found written in the book of life (Rev. 20:11-15). They are not given eternal life.

11. Death and hell to be abolished

“So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory, 55) O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (I Cor. 15:54-55) (*It is not until then that we will actually possess immortality*).

“And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” (Rev. 20:14).

“For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch” 3) “And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts” (Mal. 4:1-3).

(Death and hell will have then perished -- passed out of existence).

12. Spirit of life

“Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath or spirit of life, and man became a living being (soul)” (Gen 2:7 AMP).

“However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. 47) The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. 48) As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. 49) Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly” (I Cor. 15:45-49 NASU).

“For as long as life is in me and the breath of God is in my nostrils, my lips certainly will not speak unjustly, Nor will my tongue mutter deceit” (Job 27:3-4 NASU).

“The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life” (Job 33:4).

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26).

“Maid, arise. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway” (Luke 8:54-55).

“So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath (spirit) came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon

their feet, an exceeding great army” (Ezek. 37:10). Ezekiel 37 is very clearly describing a future physical resurrection, (the second resurrection mentioned in Revelation 20:5).

13. The body, soul, and spirit of man

“And may the God of peace Himself sanctify you through and through [separate you from profane things, make you pure and wholly consecrated to God]; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved sound and complete [and found] blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (the Messiah)” (I Thess. 5:23 AMP).

a. The body or flesh: made from dust (Gen. 2:17). (Hb. Basar, Gk. Soma and sarx). “By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19 NASU).

b. The soul: (Hb. nephesh Gk. Psyche) the unification of the spirit and the body. “For as the body without the spirit is dead,”

“Man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7, I Cor. 15:45) Notice that man was not alive until God breathed the breath of life into him, until then he was just inanimate clay.

Scriptures show that, the soul and the spirit can be divided and therefore not the same, but what spirit?

“For the Word that God speaks is alive and full of power [making it active, operative, energizing, and effective]; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating to the dividing line of the breath of life (soul) and [the immortal] spirit (*Holy Spirit*), and of joints and marrow [of the deepest parts of our nature], exposing and sifting and analyzing and judging the very thoughts and purposes of the heart. (Heb. 4:12 AMP).

c. The spirit: comes directly from God, the breath of life, that which gives consciousness (Gen. 2:7, 6:17, 7:15, 7:22) (Hb. ruach Gk. pneuma), variously translated as mind, heart, or spirit and sometimes breath or wind, when referring to things that can be felt but not seen, not to be confused with the Holy Spirit or evil spirits.

“But there is [a vital force] a spirit [of intelligence] in man, and the breath (*Holy Spirit*) of the Almighty gives men understanding” (Job 32:8 AMP). See Proverbs 2:6-11.

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit (ruwach) shall return unto God who gave it (Eccl. 12:7). It would appear this verse refers to the breath of life.

“The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and

layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him” (Zech. 12:1).

14. The soul is not immortal and can die

The soul dies when man dies, “the soul that sinneth it shall die,” (Ezk. 18:4, 18:20). The soul is composed of the spirit and the body, when the soul dies both are gone (Lake of fire).

“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (*Gehenna*)” (Matt. 10:28).

Some have compared man to a computer system: the body is like the hardware; the spirit like the software, without the software the hardware is just an inert piece of metal. Without the hardware the software cannot communicate. Neither will function without the other and separately they are of little value. However, when software is installed into the hardware it becomes a marvelously functioning computer system.

Likewise, the body of man without the spirit of life is an inert pile of dust, and the spirit (whose function is to bring life to the body) without the body is held in reserve (James 2:26). But, when God breathed the spirit of life into man’s body, man at that time became a living soul (Gen. 2:27). Similarly, when the glorified body is combined with the spirit it shall be raised immortal.

15. God knows the end from the beginning

“I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done,” (Isa. 46:9-10).

God can sometimes, and often does, speak of the future as though it is present, because He knows it will be as He says.

“--- (God) who gives life to the dead and speaks of the nonexistent things that [He has foretold and promised] as if they [already] existed” (Rom. 4:17 AMP).

Satan, the god of this world (II Cor. 4:4), has deceived the whole world (Rev.12:9) and nearly the very elect (Matt. 24:24).

God warned that “thou shalt surely die”, but Satan said, “Ye shall not surely die: (if you don't die, aren't you immortal?) For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 2:17; 3:4-5).

But man believed Satan rather than God, (and still does) and is convinced of his own immortality, so God again reminded man: “...for out of it (ground) wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Rev. 3:19).

Private interpretations

“[Yet] first [you must] understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is [a matter] of any personal or private or special interpretation (loosening, solving). For no prophecy ever originated because some man willed it [to do so--it never came by human impulse], but men spoke from God who were borne along (moved and impelled) by the Holy Spirit” (II Peter 1:20-21 AMP).

Satan has convinced man that since we are “as gods”, and therefore can judge for ourselves good and evil, we often construe Gods word to fit our cherished beliefs and traditions counter to His testimonies (Prov. 2:6-11).

The following statements are often heard as having absolute authority from many pulpits. Based on the absolutes (testimonies) that are found in God’s inspired word, can you detect the sophistry in these statements?

1. Man has an immortal soul that cannot be destroyed and lives on into eternity after death.
2. At death the body returns to dust, but the spirit goes to heaven (or hell) fully conscious.
3. The spirits of the dead are conscious and are right now in heaven, hell or purgatory.

4. Since the resurrection of Christ, all the dead saints and all that die in this age go immediately to heaven.
5. Those saints that were resurrected when Christ rose went with Him to heaven, never to die again.
- 6 Under the right conditions, the dead can communicate with the living.
7. The thief on the cross went to heaven with Christ that very day.
8. Enoch did not die but went straight to heaven because God took him.
9. Lazarus is in heaven and the rich man is in hell.
10. Moses and Elijah are in heaven because Peter, James and John saw them talking to Jesus at the transfiguration.
11. Elijah went to heaven without dying because Elisha saw him go up to heaven in a whirlwind.
12. Paul said that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, therefore we are conscious and with the Lord at death.

13. God is not the God of the dead, but the living; therefore, the dead are alive in heaven.

14. The saints under the altar that cried out to God prove that the dead are in heaven and are fully conscious.

See book two for Biblical views of these questions.

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20). Beware of those who say that God’s law is done away; changed or replaced by grace; the light of God’s word is not in them!

“He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” (I John 2:4). God’s law was, is and always will be!

“A good understanding have all they that do his commandments” (Ps. 111:10).

There has always been and always will be many who understand that the dead are unconscious as did the Apostles. Following are a few of note.

“--- in the consciousness of the departed believer there is no interval between dissolution and investiture, however long an interval might be measured by the calendar of earthbound human history” (F. F. Bruce p. 440).

What he is saying is that time has no meaning for the unconscious. This would allow Paul to say things like, “being absent from the body and (not “is” as it is often misquoted) present with the Lord” and still not invalidate his (as well as Christ’s) statements about death being like a deep sleep. (Note that the word “is” indicates the present, but “and” is simply a connecting word and does not designate a time).

Oscar Cullman in his book, Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of The Dead? The Witness of the New Testament, states that the immortality of the soul is “one of the greatest misunderstandings of Christianity.” He contrasts the pagan concepts of the immortality of the soul with the first Christian’s understanding that the fulfillment of the resurrection remains in the future, i.e., last day. He holds the Biblical definition of death being like sleep as an accurate description of the state of the dead.

Oscar Cullman (1902—1999) D. TH., D.D. Professor of Theological Faculty of the University of Basel and of the Sorbonne in Paris.

Bishop N. T. Wright, the third most senior member of the Church of England, has challenged the belief that Christians go to heaven when they die. In his book “SURPRISED BY HOPE,” Bishop Wright quotes the Bible as saying that man enters an intermediate state between death and the resurrection described as sleep.

He states that much of “traditional Christianity” has been influenced by pagan philosophies. He cites Dante’s “A Divine Comedy” in particular, (which was written to mock the ridiculous traditions of Christianity) as setting up a heaven, hell and purgatory immediately after death.

Even Martin Luther believed that there was no consciousness after death until the resurrection and stated that such a belief was just another Catholic lie. However, the Lutheran Church of today has chosen to follow the traditions of man.

William Tyndale, who printed 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 heathen philosophers, denying that, did put that souls did ever live.... If the soul be in heaven, tell me what cause is there for a resurrection?”

One of the best arguments the nonbelievers have against Christianity is to compare it to most any of the pre-Christian pagan religions. Many of the beliefs, rituals and regalia practiced by today’s denominations can be found in various pagan religions throughout history. Thus, they claim that Christianity is just a continuation of selected pagan doctrines, but with a new idol, Jesus Christ. One of

the most common dogmas found in them is a continuation of life after death, but why not, wasn't Satan's first lie that man would not die?

When one honestly compares the beliefs and practices of today's churches with the Christian teachings as taught by Christ and the apostles we find a great disparity in many areas. Significant is the life after death concept.

If any of the apostles were to happen upon a typical Christian church during a worship service today, they would think they had wandered into a pagan temple.

“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit *and* in truth” (John 4:24). Can you worship a God of truth with religious lies?

Believe nothing just because a so-called wise man said it. Believe nothing just because a belief is generally held. Believe nothing just because it is said in ancient books. Believe nothing just because it is said to be of divine origin. Believe nothing just because someone else believes it; (*adapted from the sayings of Buddha*).

Shouldn't we believe only what we have verified and judged to be from the foundation of God's word and lean not on our own understanding (Prov. 3:5).

“When we blindly adopt a religion, a political system, or a dogma, we become automatons and cease to grow” *Anais Nin*.

The objective of this study is to bring out a Bible based view to what traditional Christianity considers a closed subject. It is intended as a study guide for use with one’s own Bible to look up and prayerfully study all relevant scriptures of a given subject in their context. Certainly there are other scriptures that could be and should be included or that need to be explained, some will be discussed in part two of this series.

END PART ONE

You are invited to go to **Life After Death** part two for further study on this subject.

All Bible references are from the King James Bible unless otherwise noted.

Del Leger, Christian Church of God, www.ccofgod.org (970) 249 6857, dlleger@montrose.net. 1/31/08,

Bible study guides on related topics:

LIFE AFTER DEATH part two – ANGELS -- UNDERSTANDING HELL – HAS TRADITIONAL CHRISTIANITY LOST IT’S WAY?