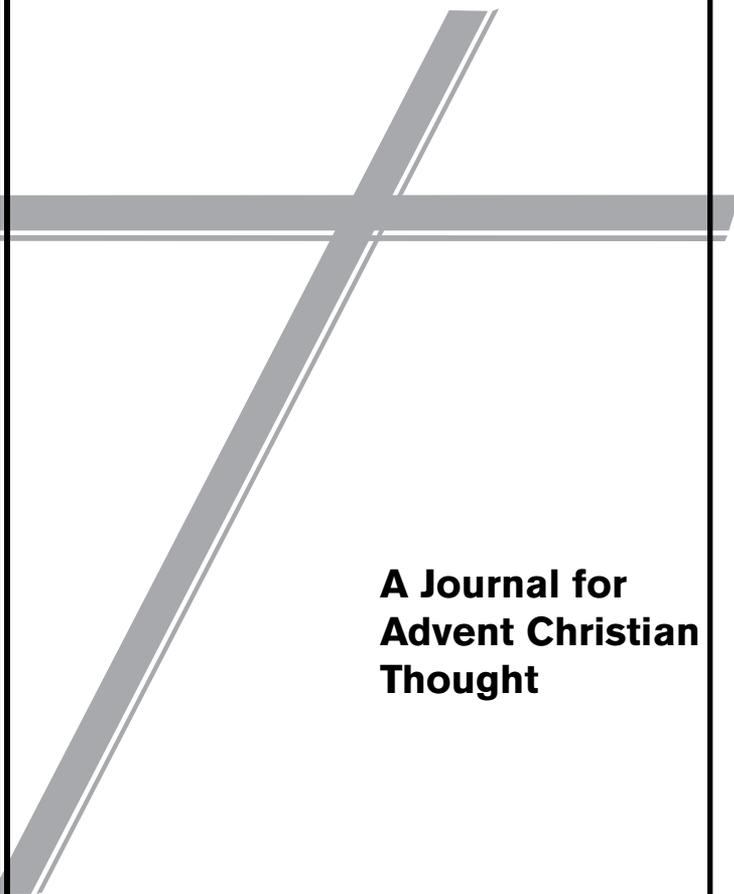


# **HENCEFORTH ...**



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Advent Christian  
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# GENDER EQUALITY IN MINISTRY

by Rev. Jefferson Vann

The Bible is somewhat unique compared with the sacred books of other religions in how it honors the women who have served the Lord throughout history. It commends the service of these faithful female saints who took upon themselves roles normally expected of men: roles like that of prophet,<sup>1</sup> judge,<sup>2</sup> warrior,<sup>3</sup> worship leader,<sup>4</sup> and missionary.<sup>5</sup>

The recent theological doctrine known as complementarianism insists that God has prescribed certain functions in the New Testament church that cannot be rightly performed by women.

- The Bible teaches in Christ there is “neither male nor female.”<sup>6</sup> But complementarians insist that those words are not a general axiom — that they only apply to salvation. One wonders if these same exegetes would have a problem seeing full ethnic equality (no Jew nor Greek), or full social equality (no slave nor free) from the same verse. These are universally recognized axiomatic statements. A person claiming that people of all races are equal in Christ when it comes to salvation, but that the races have different roles in the church would be rightly branded a bigot and racist. The recognition that slaves and free are equal in Christ was the beginning of a revolution that has led to the almost universal abolition of slavery. This happened

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 15:20; Judges 4:4; 2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chronicles 34:22; Isaiah 8:3; Luke 2:36.

<sup>2</sup> Judges 4:4.

<sup>3</sup> Judges 4:18-23.

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 15:20.

<sup>5</sup> Acts 18:2, 18, 26; Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19.

<sup>6</sup> Galatians 3:28.

because the church recognized that Paul's words were a challenge to the ideological basis of slavery. In other words, his words applied to more than the mere fact that Christ can save a slave's soul.

- The Bible teaches that God shows no partiality.<sup>7</sup> Complementarians teach that God reserves certain tasks for males only. It is granted that throughout history, most of society's leading and teaching roles have been performed by males. But complementarianism goes beyond that assertion. It insists that God's purpose is thwarted when a female takes on a teaching and leading role, particularly in the church. In the complementarian system of doctrine, God has a design to show humanity, a design where he is at the top, and under him are males, and under them are females. They insist that the husband's headship of the wife in Scripture<sup>8</sup> implies that male ministers must be the head of the church. But it is this same text that tells us there is only one head of the Christian church: Christ himself.
- The Bible warns Christians against preferring one person over another.<sup>9</sup> Complementarians teach that God

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<sup>7</sup> Acts 10:34.

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 5:23. The principle of submitting to one another (5:21) was to be fleshed out by wives submitting to their husbands' headship (5:22–24), by husbands sacrificially loving and nourishing and cherishing their wives equally — as their own bodies, because both are equal members of the body of Christ (5:25–33), by children obeying not just their fathers, but both parents equally (6:1–3), and by fathers not provoking their children to anger, but bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (6:4), by slaves obeying their masters because they are serving Christ (6:5–8), and masters treating their slaves fairly because God is not partial to the masters, but sees them both equally. The passage as a whole is not an argument for treating anyone differently because of status. It argues for equality, fairness and mutual love.

<sup>9</sup> James 2:1–13.

endorses prejudice against women when it comes to teaching and leadership in the church. While James was speaking specifically of a preference toward the rich, and against the poor, the context was exactly the same context that we are dealing with in the egalitarian/ complementarian debate: local church influence. The principle is stated as an axiom in James 2:1 “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favoritism.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the principle applies to other kinds of favoritism and prejudice as well as the tendency to honor the rich and ignore the poor. James teaches that God’s wisdom is impartial.<sup>11</sup> Paul expressed the same principle when he commanded Timothy not to take sides or show favoritism to anyone.<sup>12</sup> To suggest (as the complementarians do) that men and women are equal but must perform different roles is simply a theological endorsement of widespread cultural favoritism toward male leadership. It has less to do with what the Bible prescribes and more to do with what the modern evangelical church in many cultures (including U.S. culture) is comfortable with.

- The Bible predicted that under the new covenant, women would take on more prominent ministry roles. The prophet Joel predicted the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and specifically that it would result in the daughters of Israel engaging in prophecy.<sup>13</sup> The apostle Peter acknowledged that the miracle of Pentecost accomplished exactly that.<sup>14</sup> Later in the book of

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<sup>10</sup> NIV.

<sup>11</sup> James 3:17.

<sup>12</sup> 1 Timothy 5:21.

<sup>13</sup> Joel 2:28.

<sup>14</sup> Acts 2:17.

Acts we find evidence of women with prophetic roles,<sup>15</sup> which shows that Pentecost was just the beginning of this age in which the prophetic role was not generally limited to males. Paul spoke of this same prophetic gift as part of the equipping ministry of the church.<sup>16</sup> Yet complementarians insist that this role and other equipping ministry functions must be performed by men only. They also dare to suggest that their position is the only one that can be argued from Scripture. That is hardly the case.

I concede that Paul in the first century temporarily limited the leadership in two or three of his newly established churches to men only.<sup>17</sup> What I do not concede is that he did so out of some pre-understanding of the complementarian theological position. He never joined *The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. He never sat under the teachings of John MacArthur, John Piper or Mark Driscoll. These advocates of complementarianism merely presume that all the New Testament apostles limited the leadership of all the churches to men because of the theological understanding by which they endorse limiting leadership roles to men. This is doing theology backwards. Correct theologizing

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<sup>15</sup> Acts 21:9.

<sup>16</sup> Ephesians 4:11–12.

<sup>17</sup> This is clear from Paul's qualification lists for overseers and deacons in Ephesus and Crete (1 Timothy 3:1–13; 2 Timothy 2:15–26; Titus 1:5–11). A similar but slightly different treatment is found in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, where Paul appears to temporarily restrict women on the basis of a local law (νομος) against their speaking in public. There is no scriptural law with this restriction. For the complementarians to use this passage to argue against women in leadership is to turn a pagan law into a scriptural principle! It is also unclear how Paul can teach that women cannot speak in church in 1 Corinthians 14, when he has already conceded that they are praying and prophesying in church in 1 Corinthians 11:5. This has led one scholar on 1 Corinthians (Fee) to suggest that 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 might be a non-Pauline addition to the text.

understands statements of Scripture in their context and then devises theological understanding from that exegesis.

No one believes that all the commands of Scripture are binding for all generations and cultures. Most of the commands concerning worship under the Mosaic covenant, for example, cannot be observed under the new covenant. This is not merely because there is no tabernacle or temple, but these commands themselves were only meant for a certain people at a certain time in history. When exegetes look at any command in Scripture, they must ask if that command is still binding, and in what way is it binding. These questions cannot be answered simply by presuming that all New Testament commands are binding, and all Old Testament commands are not. Jesus endorsed many of the Old Testament commands by repeating them in his gospel message.<sup>18</sup> But also, some of the commands that the apostles gave were based not on a moral principle, but a strategic one.

For example, the apostles and elders at the Jerusalem Council commanded that the church avoid contact with strangled animals and blood.<sup>19</sup> Although that command was appropriate and legitimate, it was apparently not based on some eternal theological principle, but was strategic. The apostles wanted to keep the door of communication open in the church between Jews and Gentiles. So, they commanded the church seeking to evangelize Gentiles not to engage in behavior that would unnecessarily offend the Jews. The principle that guided these commands was that evangelism was the first priority. So, although the apostles conceded that this kind of contact does not actually defile a person spiritually,<sup>20</sup> they nevertheless encouraged people to keep that prohibition against things strangled and blood in order to reach the most people with the gospel.

The Pauline rules about male leadership were precisely the same thing. His goal was to reach the most people with the gos-

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<sup>18</sup> Mark 10:17–19; 12:28–31.

<sup>19</sup> Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew 15:11, 20; Acts 10:14–15; Romans 14:14.

pel message. The new churches that he planted in Ephesus and Crete were in cultures where only males were literate, educated, and leaders in the communities. His instructions to Timothy and Titus made perfect sense in those contexts. He would not allow women to lead, not for theological reasons (because of a God-designed gender role), but because none of the women were qualified at the time. They were not able to teach, because they had not been taught. Paul made a strategic rule based on the priority of the gospel.

Would Paul make the same rule in a modern-day church plant? He would if he believed that ministry roles are gender-specific. But he would not if his goal is to reach the most people with the gospel. Today's church has an army of females who are not only literate, they have advanced theological educations, knowing their way around the Bible, and understanding the culture that they are called to reach with its gospel message. In most — but not all — contexts today,<sup>21</sup> women can fully function in teaching, planning, counseling and other leadership roles in the church, if we will only allow them to do so.

Limiting these godly women to non-leadership roles in today's church is not something we should blame the apostle Paul for. After all, his was the pen that, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote in Christ there is no male and female. He took every opportunity to praise the Lord for and commend his female coworkers.<sup>22</sup> And even while he was commanding the illiterate new believing women of Ephesus to learn peacefully in the church worship services to avoid distracting their husbands, what he actually told them to do was to be *discipled quietly and submissively*.<sup>23</sup> Jesus commanded the apostles to disciple all na-

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<sup>21</sup> There are still some cultures today where women are forbidden education and denied leadership in society because of perceived inferiority.

<sup>22</sup> Romans 16:1–15; 2 Timothy 4:19–21.

<sup>23</sup> εν ήσυχια μανθανετω εν παση ύποταγη. Note that the noun mathētés (disciple) is listed as having derived from this verb manthanō (See Bauer, Liddell Scott, Thayer and Friberg lexicons).

tions. It is understood that every disciple is to become a discipler. This included those untrained women. Paul wanted them to be trained so that they, too, would share the gospel with their unsaved neighbors. The ultimate goal that Paul was after was not submission, but training. Neither untrained women nor untrained men should speak in church. There is no complementarian theology here. It is simply the ministry of the gospel at work. This is the gospel that Paul said he was set apart for.<sup>24</sup> He had previously been a Pharisee, set apart for the commands and traditions of men. Now he had pledged himself to be a steward from God of making his Word fully known.<sup>25</sup> That was Paul's motivation, and the reasons for his commands. Paul's temporary sanctions against women in teaching and leading roles were designed to allow them time to learn so that they could eventually exercise the gifts that the Holy Spirit would give them for the building up of the body of Christ.

It is sometimes argued that Paul must have commanded silence of the Ephesian wives on the basis of principle, not strategy, because he states "For God made Adam first, and afterward he made Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived. His wife was deceived, and sin was the result."<sup>26</sup> The assumption is that this statement removes Paul's command from its contemporary context and asserts it as a universal and timeless truth, revealed at creation — before any cultures or ages existed. The complementarian is arguing that Eve usurped her God-given role as a woman by instructing her husband, and Adam sinned by following her instructions.

Genesis does say, "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her,

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<sup>24</sup> Romans 1:1.

<sup>25</sup> Colossians 1:25.

<sup>26</sup> 1 Timothy 2:13–14.

and he ate.”<sup>27</sup> And Adam was judged partly because he “listened to the voice of ” his wife. But the only sin identified here, and later explained by Paul,<sup>28</sup> is the actual eating of the forbidden fruit. That transgression was what warranted their banishment from Eden. The complementarian reads into the text a prohibition that was never announced by God. God did not prohibit Eve from speaking to her husband, and he did not prohibit Adam from listening to his wife.

There is another way of looking at Paul’s use of Genesis in 1 Timothy 2:13–14. He does not go back to creation so that he can prove that Adam was more spiritually equipped to lead than Eve. When God created all things, he said it was very good. In fact, there was only one thing about creation that God said was not good. He said it was not good that man should be alone. Adam was great, but he needed Eve. Satan knew that if he wanted to convince Adam, he would have to convince Eve first. This does not mean that Eve was spiritually weaker. It simply means that Adam (like most husbands) was more inclined to believe his wife. If that serpent had approached Adam first, he probably would have failed his mission — not because Adam was spiritually superior, but because Adam had been given the prohibition against the fruit from God himself. So, Paul could be arguing that the husbands in Ephesus are vulnerable to be misled by their wives simply because they are their wives. He cautions the wives not to jump to the opportunity to prove their equality to their husbands. Instead, they should take their time, learn the gospel and the truths from Scripture, and then they will be able to lead others to Christ as well.

This is one of the things that bothers me about this whole women in ministry debate. Scripture does not blatantly say that men are naturally better qualified than women to preach or teach. The point of grace is that nobody is naturally quali-

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<sup>27</sup> Genesis 3:6 ESV.

<sup>28</sup> Romans 5:12–14.

fied. That is why I think the issue of spiritual leadership should be more based on spiritual gifts than fleshly gender. In fact, the Pauline qualification lists were mostly about moral and spiritual excellence. These leadership qualities are not innate natural talents, built into people's DNA. They are developed by time and experience.

Most of us live in a culture and an age that is radically different than first century Ephesus. I think Paul's strategic advice to 21st century believers would be quite different than what he told 1st century Ephesus. The theological principles of equality and the Lordship of Christ, and the priority of preaching the gospel would remain the same. But he would look at our churches filled with highly educated, Spirit filled, and otherwise qualified believers who happen to be women, and he would ask us why we so frequently fail to utilize them and their Holy Spirit-given gifts.

If we look beyond those particular temporary prohibitions against female leaders in Ephesus and Crete, we see evidence of women in leadership in the New Testament Church in Thyatira,<sup>29</sup> Pontus,<sup>30</sup> Caesarea,<sup>31</sup> Cenchrea,<sup>32</sup> and Rome.<sup>33</sup> Since the complementarians have already stated their theological position against female leadership, they must now argue against each of these as evidence for gender equality in ministry. Some of their arguments may be valid. For example, while Lydia organized the first church in Philippi at her home, perhaps she did surrender the leadership of that church to Luke, or the Philippian jailer, once he came to Christ. Also, none of these ladies exercised their gifts apart from the leadership of the other apostles, who were male. But what could the biblical authors have meant to tell us by

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<sup>29</sup> Lydia (Acts 16:11–15).

<sup>30</sup> Priscilla (Acts 18:18, 26; Romans 16:3; 2 Timothy 4:9) who helped Apollos by explaining the way of God to him more accurately.

<sup>31</sup> The seven daughters of Philip (Acts 21:8–9) who were prophetesses.

<sup>32</sup> Phoebe (Romans 16:1) whom Paul specifically identified as a deacon.

<sup>33</sup> Junia (Romans 16:7) whom Paul lists as “of note among the apostles” (missionaries).

providing these statements if not the fact that women also served as leaders in the New Testament churches?

In her excellent book, “Women in the Maze,”<sup>34</sup> church historian Ruth Tucker shows not only that the early New Testament had many capable women in ministry, but in some cases, after severe persecution women in ministry was all some churches had left. She also outlines the role of the church fathers, like Tertullian, who taught Christian women that they are “the devil’s gateway,” John Chrysostom, who taught, “Better is a man’s wickedness than a woman’s goodness.”<sup>35</sup> This kind of teaching brings shame upon Christ and the church, and has led the church to descend to the level of the patriarchal societies it has been called to reach.

Obviously, the theological position of complementarianism does not go that far. It is a careful, reasoned attempt to deal with Scriptures that appear to limit women’s role in church ministry. But the doctrine is not necessary. Each of the passages cited by complementarian teaching is within its own historical context. Most of them are in the epistles, which make them examples of occasional writing. That means that each is a description of a problem faced by a New Testament church and had to be addressed by the apostles who founded or were responsible for that church. The rules that the apostles made were strategic, and they were made so that the church could continue to proclaim the gospel and not be sidetracked by its problems.

The development of complementarianism as a theological system is a wrong-headed and dangerous approach to such passages. It turns those commands by the apostles into some sort of new universal law, that must be now be accepted as an addition to the gospel and its truth. So, now believers are left proclaiming “Christ has set you free from the law” on one side of their

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<sup>34</sup> Ruth A Tucker, *Women in the Maze*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

<sup>35</sup> Tucker, 148–149.

mouths, and “you are still under the law of male leadership” on the other side of their mouths. Naturally, the unbelievers listen to that kind of talk and declare it as what it is — double-speak. So, the very restrictions that some New Testament churches had as a means of reaching their culture are now used to prevent us from reaching ours!

Finally, I would like to appeal to my brothers and sisters to examine what the Bible says about our future as individuals. The New Testament tells us that there is an “age to come,”<sup>36</sup> and we need to consider it because it helps us to understand the way things are now and what we should be aiming at. When Jesus’ enemies challenged him to answer a question about marriage and the future, he told them that their question was wrong because they did not understand the Scriptures nor did they comprehend God’s power.<sup>37</sup> Instead, Jesus told them that those who are raised to eternal life will not marry but will be like the angels who now reside in heaven.

So, God is going to powerfully change those who are raised to new life at the return of Christ. One of the differences that will exist in that new age is that there will be no marriage. If there is no marriage, there is no complementarian system to define the roles of male and female. If the eternal kingdom, then, requires no gender roles, why does the church need them set in stone today? Why not allow the mission to determine who the missionaries are? Why not allow the act of service to determine who is best to serve? Why not allow the need to know to determine who is qualified to preach or teach?

Complementarianism as a theological system has hijacked certain Scriptures and is twisting them so as to force the church of Jesus Christ to act unchristian. It forces well-meaning believers to unwittingly show favoritism, to resist the Holy Spirit’s outpouring on women enabling them to prophesy, and to set up a

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<sup>36</sup> Matthew 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; Hebrews 6:5.

<sup>37</sup> Matthew 22:29.

false hierarchy in a church that the LORD determined to manifest equality in race, social status and gender. For that reason, brothers and sisters, I ask you not to endorse complementarianism as a standard for your churches. I ask you to seek qualified ministry leaders based on moral and spiritual attributes, not natural and physical ones.

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**A REFORMATION CRISIS CONCERNING THE SOUL –  
MORTAL OR IMMORTAL?  
by William Kilgore**

Central among the theological crises of the Protestant Reformation were the doctrines of the authority of Scripture and justification by faith alone.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, there were several less visible theological crises during the same period that were possibly obscured by the priority of the more central doctrines. One such crisis involved the doctrine of the immortality of the soul — the idea that the real human person inhabits the physical body and

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<sup>1</sup> Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *The Reformation* (Grand Rapids, 1979), 27, 35; Heiko A. Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, 1992), 104–125, 283. Most of the Roman-Catholic doctrines directly addressed by the Protestant Reformers touched these two major areas in some way. For instance, papal infallibility was rejected and attacked because the Reformers believed that it added to the authority of the Bible. Likewise, the priesthood and the Mass, as well as the remedial purpose of purgatory, were seen as unwelcome additions to justification by faith.

lives on after death.<sup>2</sup> Within the Christian context, this involved the idea that a person goes to heaven or hell when he/she dies. While this was a minor crisis given the broader context of the time, the long range effects of its outcome were not: the vast majority of Protestants the world over hold firmly to the immortality of the soul to this very day.<sup>3</sup> In this paper, I will survey the background of this doctrine up to the Reformation, the waning of the doctrine in the teaching of the early Reformers, and John Calvin's defense of the catholic position (along with Zwingli and Bullinger) that settled this issue for future Protestants.

Hebrew anthropology, based on their Old Testament Scriptures, saw human beings as a whole unit made up of body and spirit. Together, both components formed a "soul" — that is, a whole being.<sup>4</sup> This, of course, contrasted sharply with the Platonic thought of Greece, which viewed the inner soul as the real person, "imprisoned" within a physical body.<sup>5</sup> By the time of Christ,

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<sup>2</sup> David Daniel makes reference to this theological crisis in his biography of William Tyndale: "If purgatory went, most of the Church's power and income went with it. And the reformers had themselves to sort out urgently what they now understood from the New Testament about the present state of the souls of the departed, not to mention bodily resurrection" — cf. David Daniel, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (London, 1994), 325.

<sup>3</sup> The only denomination accepted by evangelical Protestants today without qualification that holds otherwise is the Advent Christian Church, a rather obscure and small group of churches (<http://www.adventchristian.org/>). Some Protestants have come to accept, if somewhat reluctantly, the Seventh-Day Adventists as fellow Protestants (cf. Walter Martin & Hank Hanegraaff, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, Minneapolis, 1997, 517–608). Finally, the Worldwide Church of God also allows dissent on the question of the soul, but it has only been since the substantial in-house reformation of 1996 that the group has been reevaluated by most Protestants as orthodox (cf. Joseph Tkach, *Transformed By Truth*, Sisters, OR, 1997; Walter Martin & Hank Hanegraaff, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 471–494).

<sup>4</sup> Gunter Stemberger, *Jewish Contemporaries of Jesus: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes* (Minneapolis, 1995), 70: "It is quite true that postbiblical Judaism replaced the biblical anthropological unity with a more or less developed body-soul dualism ..." (emphasis mine).

<sup>5</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, 1993), 314–315, 321.

Roman domination had brought the Jews into contact with Greek thought, and many adopted Platonic ideas like the immortality of the soul.<sup>6</sup> The earliest Christians, in contrast, promoted the idea of bodily resurrection rather than an immortal soul.<sup>7</sup> With the distancing of Christianity from its Judaic roots, the influence of Greek thought on Christian theology progressed throughout the period of the Church Fathers, who were in turn influenced by the Jewish Platonist Philo (c. 25 BCE-50 CE).<sup>8</sup> In fact, it was in Alexandria, the very place where Philo lived and worked, that Church fathers like Clement (c. 150-c. 215) and Origen (c. 185-c. 254) began to imbibe the Greek idea of the soul.<sup>9</sup> This mixing of the immortal soul with resurrection became the norm during the time of Athenagoras (2nd century).<sup>10</sup> By the fifth century, Augustine of Hippo (354–430)<sup>11</sup> had successfully championed

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<sup>6</sup> Eduard Lohse, *The New Testament Environment* (Nashville, 1983), 124, 196; Stemberger, *Jewish Contemporaries of Jesus: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes*, 70–73. Lohse writes, “While in Palestine the eschatological hope was oriented to the resurrection of the dead, in the Diaspora people embraced the contemporary Greek idea of the immortality of the soul” (p. 124). And again, “In Hellenistic Judaism, it is the Greek influence that causes the belief in the immortality of the soul to be appropriated to the extent ... that the hope of eternal life also took on a different significance” (p. 196, emphasis his).

<sup>7</sup> Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 572.

<sup>8</sup> Lohse, *The New Testament Environment*, 138–140; cf. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 315, 336, 521. Ferguson writes that “Patristic theology took shape largely in the framework of Platonic philosophy ... Plato’s emphasis on ... a deathless soul distinct from the body ... has been enormously influential” (p. 315). However, it should also be noted that the progression of emphasis from bodily resurrection to the immortality of the soul was gradual, with the earliest Church Fathers (e.g., Tatian, c. 160) defending the former and rejecting the latter — cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Volume 1 — The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (100–600) (Chicago, 1971), 30.

<sup>9</sup> Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Volume 1 — The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, 47–52.

<sup>10</sup> Pelikan, 47–52.

<sup>11</sup> All name spellings and years for persons mentioned throughout this paper are based on those provided by John Bowden, *Who’s Who in Theology* (New York, 1992).

the doctrine of the immortality of the soul as a concession in his dialogues with the Platonists.<sup>12</sup> By this time, the teaching was crystallized as the orthodox position in Christendom, thanks in large part to the eloquence of Augustine's writings. The immortality of the soul would not be substantially reconsidered in Christendom until nearly a millennium later.

When hints of reformation began appearing in the centuries before Luther, men began to challenge established Catholic doctrines. Foremost among the precursors to Luther's reformation was John Wyclif (1325 – 1384), whom some claim denied the Catholic doctrine of the immortality of the soul.<sup>13</sup> Apparently due to such dissenters on this issue, Pope Leo X (held papacy, 1513 – 1521) issued a statement in the eighth session of Lateran Council V on December 19, 1513 condemning all who would deny that the soul is immortal:

Since in our days (and we painfully bring this up) the sower of cockle, ancient enemy of the human race, has dared to disseminate and advance in the field of the Lord a number of pernicious errors, always rejected by the faithful, *especially concerning the nature of the rational soul, namely, that it is mortal ...* with the approval of this holy Council, we condemn and reject all who assert *that the intellectual soul is mortal ...* we decree that all who adhere to errors of this kind are to be shunned and to be

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<sup>12</sup> Christopher A. Hall, *Learning Theology With the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL, 2002), 262; Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes* (Houston, 1982), 373.

<sup>13</sup> I have been unable to verify this in firsthand sources. In favor of the assertion is the fact that noted advocates of the immortality of the soul have conceded that Wyclif is to be included among those who denied the doctrine — cf. Martin & Hanegraaff, *Kingdom of the Cults*, 556; Dr. Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis, 1984), 200. However, against the inclusion of Wyclif here is the fact that he is noted for revising, rather than denying, the doctrine of purgatory, which would seemingly include an underlying notion of the immortality of the soul.

punished as detestable and abominable infidels who disseminate most damnable heresies and who weaken the Catholic faith.<sup>14</sup>

Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) stood on the shoulders of these condemned precursors and started a revolution in 1517 with the nailing of his 95 Theses to the church door at Wittenberg.<sup>15</sup> Seemingly unwittingly, Luther had initiated a reformation that would affect many spheres, including the ideological. What became known as the Protestant Reformation created an environment where Catholic ecclesiastical authority had been cast off and Catholic orthodoxy challenged in many important areas. Like some of his predecessors, Luther initially denied the immortality of the soul. Commenting in 1520, Luther referred to the immortality of the soul, along with other doctrines asserted by the Pope, as simply another “endless monstrosity” on “the Roman dunghill of decretals.”<sup>16</sup> This was in direct reaction to the pronouncements of Lateran Council V concerning the soul.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Fifth Lateran Council, EWTN Global Catholic Network, <<http://www.ewtn.com/library/COUNCILS/LATERAN5.HTM>>, accessed 18 November 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Harold J. Grimm, ed., *Luther's Works, Volume 31: Career of the Reformer: I* (Philadelphia, 1957), 17.

<sup>16</sup> Martin & Hanegraaff, *Kingdom of the Cults*, 556. Unfortunately, I am forced to rely on this secondary source for this widely quoted statement. Luther issued four separate responses to Pope Leo X's declarations. The statement I have quoted is found in his third reply, *Assertio omnium articulorum M. Lutheri per bullam Leonis X. novissimam damnatorum*, published in December, 1520. This particular writing does not seem to be extant in an English translation, the most complete set of Luther's Works (Philadelphia, 1981) opting for the inclusion of the final reply of March, 1521 only. The original source for the quote that is normally cited is the Weimar edition of Luther's Works, Volume VII, 131–132, written in German. I justify the quotation's inclusion here because: 1) it is the clearest denunciation of the immortality of the soul found in Luther's writings, and 2) because it is widely quoted by responsible scholars (who are capable of translating the German) on both sides of the issue.

<sup>17</sup> Also mentioned in Luther's warning to the German people of 1530. Cf. Franklin Sherman & Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther's Works, Volume 47: The Christian in Society IV* (Philadelphia, 1981), pp. 37–38.

As late as 1542, Luther was still speaking of death as a “sleep” and emphasizing the bodily resurrection in his funeral instructions:

St. Paul writes to those at Thessalonica (1 Thess. 4:13), that they should not sorrow over the dead as the others who have no hope, but that they should comfort themselves with God’s Word, as those who possess sure hope of eternal life and the resurrection of the dead. For it is no wonder that those who have no hope, grieve; nor can they be blamed for this. Since they are beyond the pale of the faith in Christ they either must cherish this temporal life alone and love it and be unwilling to lose it, or store up for themselves, after this life, eternal death and the wrath of God in hell, and go there unwillingly. But we Christians, who have been redeemed from all this through the precious blood of God’s Son, should train and accustom ourselves in faith to despise death and regard it as a deep, strong, sweet sleep; to consider the coffin as nothing other than a soft couch of ease or rest.<sup>18</sup>

It would certainly seem that the immortality of the soul had earned its place on the list of discarded Catholic doctrines like meritorious works in salvation, the cult of the saints, a special priesthood and purgatory.

About the time that Luther was active in Germany, William Tyndale (c. 1494 – 1536) was denying the immortality of the soul in England. As with Luther, the initial motivation underlying this denial seemed to be the various Roman-Catholic doctrines hinging upon a continued existence after death: prayers to saints, purgatory and indulgences. Tyndale addressed the subject in two disputes with two different men. In 1534, Tyndale was involved in a dispute with George Joye, one of his earlier assistants

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<sup>18</sup> Martin Luther, *Works of Martin Luther, Volume 6* (Philadelphia, 1932), 287–288.

in translating the New Testament.<sup>19</sup> Joye had apparently taken it upon himself to publish Tyndale's New Testament with certain significant changes, one of which was to change the word "resurrection" in more than 20 instances to a reference to a disembodied afterlife.<sup>20</sup> This change was directly connected to ongoing personal discussions between Joye and Tyndale concerning the soul.<sup>21</sup> Thus, incidentally, Tyndale briefly defended the doctrine of the resurrection over against the immortality of the soul in response to Joye's self-publication of his work.<sup>22</sup>

A second, and more significant, dispute was with Sir Thomas More and resulted in Tyndale's *An Answere Unto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue* [*sic*], published in 1531. In this detailed response to his ideological foe, Tyndale clearly stated his position on the soul:

... all soules lye and slepe tyll domes daye.... And ye in puttynge them in heuen hell and purgatory / destroye the argumentes wherewith Christ and paule proue the resurreccion. What god doeth with them / that shall we know when we come to them. The true faith putteth the resurreccion which we be warned to loke-fore euery houre. The hethen philosophours denyenge that / did put that the soules did euer liue. And the pope ioyneth the spirituall doctrine of christe and the fleshly doctrine of philosophers to gether / thynges so contrary that the can not agre ... if the soules be in heuen / tell me whi they be not in as good case as the angelles be? And then what cause is there of the resurreccion? [*sic*]<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> David Daniel, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (London, 1994), 288.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel, 321–323.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Demaus, *William Tindale: A Biography* (London, 1887), 444–446.

<sup>22</sup> Demaus, 462–463.

<sup>23</sup> Anne M. O'Donnell & Jared Wicks, ed.s, *An Answere Unto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue* (Washington, D.C., 2000), 181–182. Earlier in the text, Tyndale argued his viewpoint in more detail, answering specific Scriptures set forth by More as proof-texts for the immortality of the soul (cf. pp. 117–119).

It is quite probable that Tyndale actually spent some time with Luther in 1525, as some of his contemporaries recorded and testified on more than one occasion.<sup>24</sup> Tyndale was also charged with “spreading the heresy of Lutheranism.”<sup>25</sup> Is it possible that Luther and Tyndale communicated regarding the immortality of the soul? While the details of their conversations are unavailable, it is certainly possible that such may have been the case.

John Calvin (1509 – 1564) was another Reformer who became active in France and did precisely what Augustine of Hippo had done so many centuries earlier. One of his first writings was written against the doctrine of soul sleep and was titled *Psychopannychia*, translated “On Soul Sleep.” This treatise was subtitled “Or a refutation of the error entertained by some unskillful persons who ignorately imagine that in the interval between death and the judgment the soul sleeps” [*sic*]. As one historian notes, “Calvin, at this point in company with the Catholics, became prominently involved in opposing the soul-sleepers and the mortalists.”<sup>26</sup>

Written in 1534, *Psychopannychia* was not actually published until 1542.<sup>27</sup> Although Calvin attributes the doctrine primarily to the Anabaptists, this doctrine of “soul sleep” was the same view held by (possibly) Wyclif, Tyndale and Luther himself — that the soul, rather than being immortal, “sleeps” with the death of the body until the final day when all will be physically resurrected. One scholar believes that Calvin attached “Anabaptists” as the intended foes as a device for the wider acceptance of his

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<sup>24</sup> Robert Demaus, *William Tindale: A Biography*, 117, 122.

<sup>25</sup> David Daniel, *William Tyndale: A Biography*, 375.

<sup>26</sup> George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia, 1962), 581.

<sup>27</sup> John Calvin, *Tracts and Treatises, Volume III* (Grand Rapids, 1958), 413, Historical Note. Martin Bucer (1491 – 1551) had actually urged Calvin to go ahead and publish the work in the Fall of 1538, after three Anabaptists had been drowned in the area for preaching soul sleep — “for some reason, Calvin put it off.” Cf. George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, p. 589.

work, since the Anabaptists were hated in many corners of the Reformation. This same scholar suggests that Calvin was actually addressing his contemporaries, especially Luther and his followers.<sup>28</sup> It is true that there were Lutherans who held to soul sleep in 1534.<sup>29</sup> However, there is also irrefutable evidence that some Anabaptist groups did in fact hold to the doctrine of soul sleep.<sup>30</sup> In fact, Calvin may have been referring to the Libertines in Paris, a group with Anabaptist affiliations that he had become acquainted with.<sup>31</sup>

Calvin's treatise proved to be very influential, though even he seemingly did not consider the topic to be a major debate at first.<sup>32</sup> He attributed the doctrine of soul sleep to "some Arabs," with its then recent revival "being stirred up by some dregs of Anabaptists."<sup>33</sup> Then, in a moment of candor, Calvin asserted

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<sup>28</sup> William R. Estep, *Renaissance & Reformation* (Grand Rapids, 1998), 243. This view was an old opinion originally expressed by Father Francois Garasse — cf. George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 583, n. 7; George H. Tavard, *The Starting Point of Calvin's Theology* (Grand Rapids, 2000), 31.

<sup>29</sup> George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 583, n. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. William John Hinke, ed., *The Works of Huldreich Zwingli, Volume 2* (Philadelphia, 1922), 269. Zwingli wrote against the "Anabaptist" doctrine of "soul sleep" in 1531, a full three years prior to Calvin's treatise. Likewise, Bullinger, writing in 1548, gave full treatment against "soul sleep" in his *Antidotus Against the Anabaptistes* (New York, 1973). However, it is certainly true that the "Anabaptists" were not a monolithic group, having "no generally-accepted epitome of doctrine" — cf. A.G. Dickens, *Reformation and Society* (London, 1977), 135.

<sup>31</sup> George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, p. 585. Williams also notes that such "psychopannychist Anabaptists" had become a problem in Geneva by 1537 (p. 586). On March 30 of that year, Calvin actually debated two Anabaptists, John Bomeromenus and John Stordeur, on the issue of soul sleep (p. 587).

<sup>32</sup> John Calvin, *Tracts and Treatises, Volume III*, p. 415. Calvin spends his preface describing how he reluctantly entered this fray over the soul, calling it "a contest ... in which the fruit gained is not equal to the labor expended." By the end of the preface, Calvin explains that "this matter is of greater moment than many suppose" (p. 418).

<sup>33</sup> Calvin, 415. This is one of only two times that Calvin actually used the term "Anabaptists" in the entire treatise.

that Plato was more right on the nature of the soul — asserting its immortality — than “some amongst ourselves.”<sup>34</sup> One history roots Calvin’s disagreement with Luther on this issue directly in the idea that Calvin was a “Platonist,” and “therefore found it easier than Luther ... to hold to a natural persistence of the soul after death.”<sup>35</sup>

After spending a few pages defining what he meant by “soul,” Calvin then proceeded to demonstrate from Scripture “That the Soul, after the Death of the Body, still survives, endued with sense and intellect” [*sic*].<sup>36</sup> Just to be clear, he also added that “it is a mistake to suppose that I am here affirming anything else than the Immortality of the Soul.”<sup>37</sup> Calvin proceeded after this clarification to examine several passages that, to his mind, proved the immortality of the soul.<sup>38</sup> He argued persuasively and thoroughly, and also addressed the passages that were used as proof texts by his opponents.<sup>39</sup>

A debt to Augustine and other patristic sources is acknowledged as Calvin included references and quotes from the Church Fathers.<sup>40</sup> It should also be noted that Calvin in no sense denied the doctrine of a future bodily resurrection, far from it. Rather, he affirmed in his treatise both the immortality of the soul and a future rejoining of soul and body in the promised resurrection.<sup>41</sup> This, of course, is precisely the majority view in Protestant churches today. Calvin ends *Psychopannychia* by asserting that, after all, the doctrine of soul sleep must be heretical since

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<sup>34</sup> Calvin, 420. One wonders, given Calvin’s vehement words leveled at the Anabaptists, if he is actually referring to them here or to other Reformers (Luther? Tyndale?).

<sup>35</sup> George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, p. 582.

<sup>36</sup> Williams, 427.

<sup>37</sup> Williams, 427.

<sup>38</sup> Williams, 427–450.

<sup>39</sup> Williams, 450–490.

<sup>40</sup> Williams, 468–469, 478. Cf. Anthony N.S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1999).

<sup>41</sup> Williams, 469–474.

its source — the Anabaptists — is “a forge which has already fabricated, and is daily fabricating, so many monsters.”<sup>42</sup>

Both before and after Calvin wrote *Psychopannychia*, another reformer named Huldreich Zwingli (1484 – 1531) also vigorously defended the immortality of the soul. In 1531, Zwingli wrote his Exposition of the Christian Faith, in which he refuted soul sleep:

... I maintain against the Catabaptists [Anabaptists], who contend that the soul sleeps with the body until the day of judgment, that the soul whether of angel or of man cannot sleep or be at rest.<sup>43</sup>

Zwingli did basically what Calvin did in *Psychopannychia*, though much more briefly. After some philosophical observation, he focused on a few select passages from the New Testament to demonstrate the immortality of the soul.<sup>44</sup> Like Calvin, he asserted his belief in no uncertain terms: “I believe, then, that the souls of the faithful fly to heaven as soon as they leave the body.”<sup>45</sup> Again, he wrote in Platonic Language of being “freed from the body.”<sup>46</sup>

Calvin also had the support of Heinrich Bullinger (1504 – 1575), who likewise denounced soul sleep as an Anabaptist heresy in 1548.<sup>47</sup> While he treated the subject scripturally, as had both Zwingli and Calvin, Bullinger resorted to crude denunciations at times. For example, “Ye are obstacle asses, O Anabaptistes, whiche dare make mention of suche sleapyng, against so manifest places of the scriptures [*sic*].”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Williams, 490.

<sup>43</sup> William John Hinke, ed., *The Works of Huldreich Zwingli, Volume 2*, 269.

<sup>44</sup> Hinke, 270–272.

<sup>45</sup> Hinke, 271.

<sup>46</sup> G.W. Bromiley, ed., *Zwingli and Bullinger* (Philadelphia, 1953), 254.

<sup>47</sup> Heinrich Bullinger, *Antidotus Against the Anabaptistes* (New York, 1973), Treatise X, “How that the soules after that thei be departed from the body do not slepe, but lyue in christ” [*sic*] (no page numbers).

<sup>48</sup> Bullinger, (no page numbers).

It was this early treatise of Calvin, with support from other important Protestant reformers like Zwingli and Bullinger, that exerted influence on the Protestant churches. Further, Calvin did not waver one bit from the Catholic position on the soul in later life. This is apparent in his monumental work, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, completed in its final form in 1559.<sup>49</sup> Calvin defined the soul as “an immortal though created essence” that “is freed from the prison-house of the body” at death.<sup>50</sup> Further, Calvin not only used Platonic language (i.e., “prison-house”), but referred to Plato and stated his substantial agreement with the philosopher on the matter of the soul.<sup>51</sup>

Like Augustine before him, who actually was a strong influence on his own theology, Calvin had successfully championed the traditional, Catholic view of the immortal soul.<sup>52</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith (1643 – 1646), later adopted by the Presbyterian and Reformed churches that existed in Calvin’s shadow, was very specific concerning this matter, stating that, while the human body decays after death, “their souls ... neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence ...”<sup>53</sup> In fact, every original Protestant group — Lutheran, Anglican, Presbyterian/Reformed and Baptist — embraced the traditional view defended by the eloquent Calvin by the time they were settled and organized.

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<sup>49</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids, 1994), Introduction (no page number).

<sup>50</sup> Calvin, Book I, 160.

<sup>51</sup> Calvin, Book I, 166–167.

<sup>52</sup> This is acknowledged by George Huntston Williams: “In any event, [Calvin’s] arguments for immortality were still closer to those of Pope Leo than to the views of Luther.” Further, he was “on this point in company with the Catholics” (emphasis mine). Cf. *The Radical Reformation*, 582–583. Likewise, the same is expressed by Edward Fudge: “As Augustine had fixed the tradition for later Catholicism, so Calvin sealed it with the Protestant stamp of approval 1100 years later.” Cf. *The Fire That Consumes*, 383.

<sup>53</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 32, reproduced in Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, 2000), 1196.

Remaining is the question of Luther and his original position against the Catholic doctrine of the immortality of the soul. It is known that Luther embraced the traditional view in his later writings.<sup>54</sup> Further, at least some of Luther's followers were expressing a belief in the immortality of the soul as early as 1525.<sup>55</sup> The question is: why did Luther change his view? While we may never know for sure, some scholars have suggested the obvious: that Luther and his followers simply had more important things that concerned them. Their priorities were more central doctrines such as justification by faith alone and the authority of Scripture alone. To have perpetuated a dispute on the nature of the human soul among themselves would have been counter-productive, and such a dispute probably seemed relatively minor against the backdrop of the principal issues of an infant Protestantism.<sup>56</sup>

There is also another possibility for which there is some evidence. It seems that Luther's viewpoint on the afterlife may have been in flux for some time. A survey of his writings yields some signs of tentativeness and uncertainty. The soul is variously described as "living," "asleep," "at rest," "conscious," and "not conscious."<sup>57</sup> It is known that, as early as 1522, Luther expressed his

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 382.

<sup>55</sup> Ole Peter Grell & Bob Scribner, eds., *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (Cambridge, 1996), 51. A local diarist from the Hainaut province of the Low Countries is quoted as writing that part of the Lutherans' "confession" was that they believed "that there was no purgatory and that as soon as a person dies he goes straight to heaven or hell" (emphasis mine).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 382.

<sup>57</sup> Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says: An Anthology* (St. Louis, 1959), 384–387. Luther actually wrote of the soul as conscious after death in the Winter of 1542–1543, just after the earlier quoted passage asserting the sleep of the soul! Cf. Theodore G. Tappert & Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther's Works, Volume 54: Table Talk* (Philadelphia, 1981), 446–448. Biographer Richard Marius also acknowledges that Luther made seemingly paradoxical statements about this topic — cf. *Martin Luther: The Christian Between God and Death* (Cambridge, 2000), 61–64.

discomfort with being too dogmatic on the question in conversation with his friend Amsdorf.<sup>58</sup> Generally, “the precise condition of departed souls was not entirely clear to Luther,” and he had “arrived at some rather paradoxical, if not incongruous, conclusions.”<sup>59</sup>

Thus, perhaps Luther never really committed himself to his denial of the immortality of the soul as Tyndale clearly had. Perhaps Luther simply flirted with the idea of a mortal soul before said flirtation was halted by the writings of the other leaders. That *Psychopannychia* was expected to reach Luther, and possibly offend him, was one consideration of Calvin’s in delaying its publication.<sup>60</sup> One further factor may have been the fact that, in the final 20 years of his life, Luther himself had no great love for the Anabaptists.<sup>61</sup> If he accepted the Anabaptist label given the soul sleep doctrine by Calvin, Zwingli and Bullinger, perhaps his animosity influenced him to abandon his own speculations on the issue.

For all practical purposes, and certainly for the vast majority of Protestants even up to the present day, Calvin settled the issue once and for all with his *Psychopannychia*. Everywhere from Christian funerals to cartoons, it is taken for granted that the soul of an individual departs to its deserved place after death and continues in conscious bliss or torment until the resurrection.

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<sup>58</sup> Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, 385. Also mentioned by George H. Tavard, *The Starting Point of Calvin’s Theology* (Grand rapids, 2000), 31.

<sup>59</sup> Plass, 385.

<sup>60</sup> George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 586.

<sup>61</sup> Richard Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian Between God and Death* (Cambridge, 2000), 474.

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**ANTHROPOLOGY: TO BE HUMAN**  
by Jefferson Vann

***to be human is to depend on God for life***

***Human beings are creatures, created by God and subject to the same limitations as other creatures. Presupposing that we were created immortal, and then approaching Scripture from that presupposition has led to gross misinterpretations of several texts. We can only truly understand who we are in relation to God by beginning with the reality of our total dependence upon God for life and existence.***

***In this chapter, I refute the doctrine of innate immortality, showing that humans depend upon God for life and existence just as all other creatures do.***

From the sovereign LORD of the universe we move our consideration to the being created in his image — humanity. Where-

as God can best be described as “The Independent One,” humans are first described in such a way as to highlight their dependence upon him. In his account of man’s creation, Moses said, “then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.”<sup>1</sup>

The pagan creation myths tended to focus on violent conflict. Moses speaks of creation as a benevolent, artistic act. God takes the elements with which he has molded the other parts of his universe, and he carefully produces just one more work of art. Then the creator of all life breathes life into his ultimate creation. We can only truly understand who we are by beginning with the reality of our total dependence upon God for life and existence.

### ***Formed From Dust***

There are three statements in Genesis 2:7 that, together, make up a pretty good summary of this dependence we have on God. First, Adam was made up of the dust from the ground. It does not say simply that Adam’s body was made from the dust. There is no dualism here. God did not create two things: Adam’s body and his spirit.

The Bible teaches us to view the nature of man as a unity, and not as a duality, consisting of two different elements, each of which move along parallel lines but do not really unite to form a single organism. ... it is not the soul but man that sins; it is not the body but man that dies; and it is not merely the soul, but man, body and soul, that is redeemed by Christ.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 2:7.

<sup>2</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1949), 192. quoted in Freeman Barton, *Heaven, Hell and Hades* (Lenox Mass: Henceforth ... Publications, 1990), 16.

The being created was Adam before he was ever animated by the breath from God's nostrils. After his sin, God reminded Adam that "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."<sup>3</sup> God did not say, "your body is dust, but you are something else." He did not say, "your body will return to the dust, but you will go somewhere else."

The very name "Adam" spoke of the dependence human beings have on the elements from which this planet is made. He is 'adam, and he was taken out of the 'adamah — ground. Later in Genesis we will learn that humans have the potential to be something more, but even that is a miracle of God's grace. Eternal life was never an entitlement. As first created, humans were just as dependent upon God for life as any of the other creatures God made.

In fact it was also "out of the ground (*adamah*) the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens."<sup>4</sup> Both "man and all creatures of the earth were equally formed out of the dust of the ground ... (so) ... he and all the creatures of the earth have been regarded by God as mortal beings composed of dust of the ground and the breath of life."<sup>5</sup>

Awareness of this fact of dependence upon the divine for life leads to a certain humility. Abraham, for example, could say, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes."<sup>6</sup> He did not flatter himself by imagining that he was something in God's eyes. He admitted his utter dependence upon the sovereign Lord.

Job appeals to God on the basis of his dependence on him: "Remember that you have made me like clay; and will you return

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 3:19.

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 2:19.

<sup>5</sup> George Wisbrock, *Mortal By Design*. (Chicago Ridge IL: by author, 2003), 13.

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 18:27.

me to the dust?”<sup>7</sup> Job pleads for his life, and at the same time acknowledging that God is the one who gave this life to him — so God is capable of undoing it. Job recognized that he had no innate quality that would prevent God from ending his existence.

Solomon philosophized over this fact that we are just as dependent upon God as all the other creatures as well.

“For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return.”<sup>8</sup>

His point was that it made no sense for a man to waste his life on hard work if in the end it would make no eternal difference. Only in a world where God holds out a promise does anything matter. Without him, life is meaningless. We are just like the animals.

That would be a rather bleak idea if we knew nothing more than Genesis 2:7. Indeed, our complete dependence upon God is a scary truth. But it is a truth that is foundational. We have to understand our “in Adam” identity before we can grasp with gratitude our “in Christ” hope.

“The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.”<sup>9</sup>

The gospel promises that human beings who are in Christ will one day bear his image. That includes immortality. However, that promise is conditional. It only applies to those who are “in

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<sup>7</sup> Job 10:9.

<sup>8</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:19–20.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:47–49.

Christ.” Also, it will only be experienced after his return, and the resurrection of the righteous.

There have always been those who insist that, in spite of Genesis 2:7 and 1 Corinthians 15, we already have immortality. To do so blurs the distinction that Paul saw so clearly between the creation and the restoration. It also ignores the fact that we are made of mortal, perishable, corruptible dust.

### ***Given Life by God***

The second major statement about the nature of humanity in Genesis 2:7 is the fact that God breathed into Adam’s nostrils, the breath of life. As previously stated, Adam was already Adam when God formed him from the dust. Whatever the breath of life was, it did not impart Adam’s personality or personhood. It was not some separate “soul” that took up residence in the body, but could have easily done without it. The phrase *nishmat chayim* is rendered literally “a breath of lives.” It refers to the animation of something that is at first lifeless. That same phrase is found in Genesis 7:22 referring to the animals and men who died in Noah’s flood: “Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died.” So, the phrase itself does not imply any kind of “immortal soul” that would survive death. Instead, it implies the same thing that the dust did: humans are dependent upon God for life. The breath remains God’s breath, and he can take it back whenever he wishes.

Life is a gift from God. It was true of the animals. It is true of human beings as well. There is a difference between Adam and the animals he named, but that difference is not that Adam has some kind of “get out of death free card.” The first lesson we learn about ourselves is a humbling one: we depend upon God for life.

That breath that God gave Adam that day was simply the ability to breathe. This is seen in uses of the term *neshamah* elsewhere in Scripture. Moses told the Israelites when they conquer

the Promised Land to save alive nothing that *breathes*.<sup>10</sup> In other words, no survivors. Joshua obeyed and “devoted to destruction all that *breathed*.”<sup>11</sup> If *neshamah* implied some kind of immortal soul, those statements would be contradictions.

The prophet tells us to “Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is *breath*, for of what account is he?”<sup>12</sup> It is much more important to regard the Independent One from whom the breath came. Human beings may be mighty or wise, but remove their breath, and they are again reduced to dust. They have great potential for advancement, but they are still dependent upon their creator for their next breath.

The process by which God gave breath to Adam on the day of his creation continues to be carried on by God for human beings today. God is the one who “created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives *breath* to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it.”<sup>13</sup> He continues to give life, we continue to receive it.

Spirit (*ruach*) is just another name for that life-breath. It too, is the same animating breath that gives life to the animals.<sup>14</sup> As for the animals, when God takes “away their breath, they die and return to their dust.”<sup>15</sup> As for humanity, “When his breath departs he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.”<sup>16</sup> This all important gift from God — without which we could not exist — is a reminder that we are completely dependent on him.

The good news that we will pursue in later chapters is that God plans to resurrect those who are destined for eternal life. But until that day of resurrection at Christ’s second coming, our

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<sup>10</sup> Deuteronomy 20:16.

<sup>11</sup> Joshua 10:40; 11:11, 14.

<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 2:22.

<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 42:5.

<sup>14</sup> Genesis 7:22 speaks of the breath of the spirit of life (נְשַׁמַּת־רוּחַ חַיִּים) (*nishmat-ruach chayim*) referring to the animating breath in all the men and animals that died in the flood.

<sup>15</sup> Psalm 104:29.

<sup>16</sup> Psalm 146:4.

fate at death is the same as that of the lost. The most common description of this fate in the Bible is sleep. This metaphor “suggests an instructive parallel in which death is likened to falling asleep at night, the intermediate state to the hours of unconscious rest, and the resurrection to the experience of awakening to a new day.”<sup>17</sup>

### *A Composite Unity*

The result of this creation process described in Genesis 2:7 is a being who is made up of the stuff of earth, infused with life from heaven. The Bible does not place the accent on one or the other of these facts, but insists on both. The result of creation is a composite unity. As Moses put it, “then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” Adam was not given a “soul,” he became one.

“Notice that the Bible presents man as a unitary being. While discussing man’s spirit, soul, and body, the Scripture places the emphasis upon man as a complete person. It is man — the complete being — who was created, who fell into sin, who can be saved, who dies, who will be raised again, and who will be judged.”<sup>18</sup>

This composite unity must remain together in order to be alive. The real human being is not one or the other, but “a combination of body and soul or spirit.”<sup>19</sup> If you separate the dust from the life, you no longer have a living creature. This also is a gentle reminder of our ultimate dependence upon God for life. Since sin came into God’s creation, mortality has been everyone’s condition, and death has ended every life. If not for the promise

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<sup>17</sup> Clarence H. Hewitt, *Faith For Today*. (Boston: The Warren Press, 1941), 106.

<sup>18</sup> David A. Dean, *Resurrection Hope*. (Charlotte: ACGC, 1992), 40.

<sup>19</sup> James A. Nichols, Jr., *Christian Doctrines* (Nutley NJ: Craig Press, 1970), 119.

of a redeemer, and a future resurrection, that would be the end of our story.

Human beings are created beings, and, as such, we have an affinity with all other creatures, and the rest of the cosmos that God created. Realizing this should instill in us a desire to preserve and protect the environment, and guard the universe from abuse. This is the most fundamental fact about ourselves in Scripture (that we are created beings). From this fact flows the second most fundamental fact (that we are responsible to creation). We explore that responsibility in the next chapter.

### **to be human is to be mortal**

***The consequences of original sin in the garden of Eden include the mortality of all human beings, which makes homo sapiens no different from the animals in terms of mortality and eventual death. This dark reality is the backdrop upon which the brilliant light of eternal life offered by Christ emerges in Scripture.***

***In this chapter, I continue presenting the evidence for innate mortality, and bridge to the concept of potential immortality as a result of the atonement.***

The early chapters of Genesis have proven to be very helpful as a guide to understanding human nature. They have shown that human beings are creatures, like the animals, but that human beings were intended to be more than that. They were created in God's image and likeness, which implies a special authority from God and responsibility to him. God tested this responsibility in the Garden of Eden by planting two special trees in Eden: the *Tree of Life* (which, if eaten would have granted Adam and Eve immediate immortality), and the *Tree of Knowing Good and Evil*.

Of these two trees, only the latter was prohibited. The first humans were allowed to eat of all the other trees, including the

Tree of Life. If our ancestors had simply made the correct decision, they would have remained alive forever, along with all their descendants.

Instead, they were deceived to believe that it was the other tree that actually held promise. Satan had told them “For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”<sup>20</sup> That statement was the truth, but it implied a lie: that the tree offered immunity from death. Instead “being like God” merely meant having experienced both good and evil. God had known both the good of his original creation and the evil of Satan’s rebellion. Taking of the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil would cause humans to experience evil personally — thus wreck the purity of Eden and human intimacy with their creator.

God’s response to that sin led to a further consequence: human mortality. The persons of the Triune One speak among themselves and say ...

“Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever. Therefore the LORD God sent him out from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the Garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.”<sup>21</sup>

Before the fall, human beings had the potential to become immortal. They had the potential to become something more than what they were. As a consequence of the rebellion in Eden, this opportunity was taken away.

God wanted human beings to be immortal. He still does. He wants to establish a relationship with us that will bring glory and

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<sup>20</sup> Genesis 3:5.

<sup>21</sup> Genesis 3:22–24.

joy to both parties forever. Yet God cannot endure unrighteousness forever. Until a solution can be found that will undo the Eden rebellion, God cannot grant immortality to human beings. He was thus forced by his own nature to banish us from paradise.

So, although intended for immortality, human beings are now reduced to the same nature as the animals God has placed us over. The ancient scientist Solomon recognized this:

“I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts. For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return.”<sup>22</sup>

This is the bad news the Bible gives us, which serves as the backdrop for the good news of eternal life available through Christ.

Advent Christians proclaim Christ, and his second coming as the time when God is going to grant immortality to the saved and undo the Edenic curse. But Advent Christians have also championed the truth of this bad news: that all humanity is mortal and subject to real death. We feel that it is dishonoring God’s word to say that humans are both mortal and immortal at the same time.<sup>23</sup> We also feel that it is inconsistent evangelism to claim that Jesus offers eternal life and then teach people that they already have eternal life.

### ***Conditional Immortality***

So, instead of teaching people that immortality is innate (that is, that all human beings are born with it), we teach that it is

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<sup>22</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:18-20.

<sup>23</sup> William West explores this contradiction in *Resurrection And Immortality* (Xulon Press, 2006), 77.

conditional. God offers eternal life to those who put their faith in Christ: those are the conditions. One of the first post-apostolic writers to express conditionalism was Theophilus of Antioch:

“God did not create humanity as either mortal or immortal, but, ...with the capacity for them both. If humanity inclined towards those things which relate to immortality by keeping the commandments of God, then it would receive immortality as a reward from God ... On the other hand, if humanity should incline towards those things which relate to death by disobeying God, then humanity would be the cause of its own death.”<sup>24</sup>

When a certain man came to Jesus once, asking “What good deed must I do to have eternal life?”<sup>25</sup> — Jesus did not challenge his theological inference that eternal life is something that must be obtained. If immortality were innate, then Jesus should have stopped the man and pointed that out. Instead, Jesus agreed with the man that he needed eternal life, and then challenged the man to follow him — that he might get what he was asking for.<sup>26</sup>

The gospel is all about how God offers us what we do not have on the basis of his grace, through the atoning death of Christ. Christ’s death has met the conditions. Following Christ is the solution to the curse of Eden. A *conditionalist* is someone who does not trust in her own innate ability to live forever, but trusts in Christ’s completed work on the cross, and looks forward to the day when Christ will make her immortal.

### ***Conferred Immortality***

Advent Christians take death seriously, and that leads to our special appreciation of the gift of immortality. We understand

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<sup>24</sup> Theophilus of Antioch ad *Autolyicum* (shortly after 180 AD) quoted in Alister E. McGrath, ed. *The Christian Theology Reader* (Malden Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 646.

<sup>25</sup> Matthew 19:16.

<sup>26</sup> Matthew 19:21.

the awful consequences that are the result of sin entering God's creation, and that makes us appreciate Christ all the more. When we read Romans 6:23, it makes perfect sense as it is: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." But if a person believes that immortality is not conferred as a gift, but is an innate possession, they have to supply some interpretation for Romans 6:23 to fit their view. It then reads "For the wages of sin is death (*but only death of the body, because the real person is the soul and it cannot die*), but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (*except that eternal life is actually a right we have by birth, so Christ does not give it*)."

William Newton Clarke complained that conditionalists "argue from the silence of scripture regarding the natural immortality of man, and from the uniform association of 'eternal life' with Christ."<sup>27</sup> He was exactly right — although it is hardly reason for complaint. Scripture is silent on the natural immortality of humans because it rejects the notion. Eternal life is either conferred upon the faithful or it is innate by reason of creation. There is no logic that allows for both, or any Scripture that proves both.

### ***Future Immortality***

Advent Christians have never argued against the concept of human immortality. We simply insist that that great gift will be given to humans at the appropriate time. It has not been the possession of all humans from birth. Instead, it will be given to some humans at the return of Christ. Speaking of that return, Paul says that it will happen "in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> William Newton Clarke, *An Outline of Christian Theology* (BiblioBazaar, LLC, 2009), 452.

<sup>28</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:52–53 NIV.

That glorious day will be the beginning of “the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.”<sup>29</sup> The fact that raising the dead is first on Christ’s list when he returns should be an encouragement to us. It should enable us to face the death of our loved ones (or even our own eventual death) with courage, knowing that although death is real, it is only temporary.

### *Life Only In Christ*

The doctrine of human mortality is Christocentric, not anthropocentric.<sup>30</sup> It reveals Christ as the giver of life, not just the one who can “get you to heaven.” John states the options bluntly: “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”<sup>31</sup> The Bible is about Jesus Christ. The Old Testament pointed forward to him, the New Testament points back to him. Human mortality is the need that only Christ could meet. Paul says that God “saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”<sup>32</sup>

Over against this clear teaching from the Bible on human mortality is the persistent mistaken notion that humans are born with immortal souls or spirits that consciously survive the death of their bodies. This view sees the references to death in the Scripture as usually referring to this physical death, and there-

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<sup>29</sup> Acts 3:21 NKJV.

<sup>30</sup> Viewing mortality as an anthropocentric issue places too much emphasis on humans as created rather than humans as redeemed. Conditionalists argue that viewing mortality as an anthropocentric issue distracts believers from seeing the connection between human need for resurrection life and the solution for that problem offered in the atonement.

<sup>31</sup> 1 John 5:12.

<sup>32</sup> 2 Timothy 1:9–10.

fore irrelevant on the subject of the soul's survival. The view thus confirms both mortality and immortality at the same time. Any scriptural evidence in favor of human mortality can immediately be dismissed as not pertinent, since it (in the innate immortality view) always refers to the material aspect of human existence, and not the spiritual.

### ***Scriptures that Clash with the Innate Immortality Tradition***

This view reflects Greek dualism. It is a worldview that is read into Scripture, rather than being a part of it. It has become embedded in Christianity the way many other non-biblical traditions have. By taking a closer look at doctrines taught in Scripture, the clashes between those doctrines and the innate immortality tradition become more evident.

#### ***1 Timothy 6:16***

Scripture teaches that God “alone has immortality.”<sup>33</sup> The innate immortality view denies this, although its proponents do exercise a great deal of verbal gymnastics to try to affirm it. At issue, then, is not simply the doctrine of human nature, but the doctrine of God's nature as well. To claim immortality for sinful humanity is to deny it as an exclusive attribute of God. But when the first humans sinned, God said that they “must not be allowed to ... live forever.”<sup>34</sup> Their sin had not only affected their relationship with God (resulting in banishment from his presence in Eden), but it changed them. They had been immortal (capable of becoming immortal by eating of the Tree of Life). Now they were simply mortal.

Some argue that the term “immortality,” when it refers to God, has a different meaning than when it refers to all other be-

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<sup>33</sup> 1 Timothy 6:16.

<sup>34</sup> Genesis 3:22 NIV.

ings. They argue that “the meaning of ‘immortality’ in the Bible largely depends on its context.”<sup>35</sup> They see this as adequate justification for ignoring the contradiction found in the traditional doctrine of the immortal soul, and affirming both the exclusive immortality of God and the universal immortality of humanity as dependent upon him. Conditionalists see this as double-speak. While it is true that all words depend on their context for meaning, there is nowhere in the context of 1 Timothy 6:16 that redefines the term or assumes a distinction between how it is used by Paul there, compared to how he or other biblical authors use it elsewhere.

### **Genesis 2:17**

This is precisely what God (with tears in his eyes) warned Adam and Eve would happen if they disobey his Edenic prohibition. He said “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”<sup>36</sup> That phrase “you shall surely die” is a combination of two forms of the same verb. The word *mot* is the infinitive absolute of the verb “to die” and refers to the state of mortality that was humanity’s fate after the rebellion in Eden. From the moment they ate of the tree, humanity became a dying race. The second word is the imperfect tense of the same verb. The word *tamut* refers to the eventual and inevitable death that would come to each member of the race as a result of the fall. Together these two forms of a verb reflect a Hebrew idiom that accentuates the certainty of an action. Thus the translations render the phrase “you will surely die.” The innate immortality doctrine turns this into

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<sup>35</sup> Christopher W. Morgan, Robert A. Peterson, *Hell Under Fire* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 206. These authors discredit the conditionalist argument for exclusive immortality of God because they are seeking to defend the traditional concept of hell as the perpetual torture of immortal human souls.

<sup>36</sup> Genesis 2:17.

an empty threat since it claims that the real essence of a human person never dies.

### ***Romans 5:12***

Paul tells us that “When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.”<sup>37</sup> Sin and death have been a matched set in human experience ever since that initial sin in Eden. It is not merely the body which sins, but the whole person. That is why we need a Savior, not just someone who can raise us from the dead. Christ is both. He can restore our inner beings as well as raise our bodies. Both have been affected by sin; the wages of that sin is death to both, and the gift of God is eternal life for both.<sup>38</sup>

### ***John 3:16***

The Bible speaks of a coming day of judgment when all those who are not redeemed by Christ’s blood will totally perish in the fires of Gehenna hell.<sup>39</sup> When the Bible speaks of believers being saved, it usually refers to this event. In other words, to perish is not simply to die. To perish is to utterly die. It refers to the ultimate, permanent death in Gehenna, not to the temporary death at the end of this life. So when Jesus told Nicodemus that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” he was speaking of the two ultimate fates of mankind. To perish is to be ultimately destroyed. To have eternal life is to escape that destruction. Many texts point out the same distinction.<sup>40</sup> The innate immortality doctrine blurs that distinction because it insists

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<sup>37</sup> Romans 5:12 NLT.

<sup>38</sup> Romans 6:23.

<sup>39</sup> Malachi 4:1; Matthew 5:22,29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5.

<sup>40</sup> See also John 4:14; 5:21; 10:28; 17:2.

that no human being ultimately perishes. Thus all human beings ultimately have eternal life.

The innate immortality view distorts a crucial and essential doctrine of the Christian faith: the purpose of Christ's death on the cross. According to the Bible, Christ's death was to protect us from ultimate destruction, not to get our souls to heaven when our bodies die.

### ***1 Corinthians 15:22–23***

The Bible is also explicit on the issue of just when believers will gain the gift of immortality. It did not happen at our birth, and it will not happen at our death. Believers will be made alive at the return of Christ. Paul says “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.” Paul compares two events in history. The first event was the fall of humanity in the garden of Eden. As a result of that event, human nature became a fatal condition. The second event is the return of Christ to this earth.

The analogy Paul uses to describe the resurrection is a crop harvest. Each resurrection is a stage in the harvest. Since Christ is the firstfruits, he was resurrected first. This took place three days after his death. The second stage of the harvest includes “those who belong to Christ” when he comes. This is the believers' resurrection. Paul does not speak of Christ restoring souls with their risen bodies. Instead he speaks of the whole person being “made alive.” This is when the promise of eternal life will be fulfilled for us.

The doctrine of innate immortality also subverts this plain teaching of Scripture. According to that view, no human being ever dies, so none will ever need to be made alive. The concept of the resurrection takes a back seat to the more immediate idea of conscious survival of death. It makes the return of Christ less crucial, and rather anticlimactic.

## Summary

The consequences of original sin in the Garden of Eden include the mortality of all human beings, which makes *homo sapiens* no different from the animals in terms of mortality and eventual death. This dark reality is the backdrop upon which the brilliant light of eternal life offered by Christ emerges in Scripture. In contrast, the tradition of innate immortality dilutes the teachings of Scripture. Believing that one is already immortal by nature can make one less appreciative of the nature of God, the influence of sin, the purpose of Christ's death on the cross, and the reason for his second coming.

### *to be human is to be immortal*

*The hope of humanity is the eternal life that God offers through the sacrifice of his Son on the cross. Immortality is a potential possession. Therefore, no human life need be wasted. Each of us has the potential to be much more than what we can attain in a few short years of life. The immortality of the human soul leads to at least two practical, but seemingly contradictory conclusions: 1) all human life is valuable and must be protected, 2) the chance to be immortal is worth risking one's life for.*

*In this chapter, I outline the doctrine of potential immortality, and point out some of the implications of this doctrine, including the sanctity of human life, and the call for unlimited perseverance.*

The story of humanity begins in the past, in creation. It continues in the future, an eternal future set by God on Judgment Day. Those whom God judges as not worthy of restoration will experience "tribulation and distress," and eventually will be destroyed by God's "wrath and fury." Those who respond to his

grace in this life, and spend their lives seeking “glory and honor and immortality” by “patience in well-doing” will receive an everlasting life of “glory and honor and peace.”<sup>41</sup> This is the destiny of humanity. Without an understanding of this future reality, one can never hope to fully comprehend what human beings are.

This eternal destiny is at the core of the gospel message that Jesus revealed to the world by his ministry, death and resurrection. It involves salvation by grace, the abolition of death, and a call to live eternal lives, which manifest God’s purpose for life.<sup>42</sup> Our destiny is much more than a nice place to spend eternity. The good news is that we will be completely changed into the kind of persons who can inhabit a sinless eternity. Yet, the fact that such a transformation awaits us implies that somewhere within us today is the yearning for it: human beings are by nature — not immortal like God — but immortal.

Our conscience within us strives to share in God’s attribute of holiness. We grieve over sin and the loss and death it causes. We feel guilty when we do not live up to God’s standards. We feel angry when others sin, and when we sin. In the same way, there is something within us that reacts strongly to death — any death. We know death is real, and that it is inevitable. Yet we also know on a deeper level that it is wrong.

In 1999 Robin Williams starred in a film called “Bicentennial Man.” The movie centered on the “life” of a robot that somehow gained sentience and was like humans in every way except that he could not die. Having outlived everyone he knew and loved, the robot decided to take his own life, in order to be truly human. The film is a reminder of how death defines humanity now, but perhaps it sends the wrong message.

The Bible also preaches the reality of death, but it does so as the backdrop to the glorious good news that death is not what defines humanity. Our purpose is life and life forever. To insist

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<sup>41</sup> Romans 2:6–10.

<sup>42</sup> 2 Timothy 1:8–11.

that death is what makes us truly human is to miss that glorious truth.

### *Life as a Gift*

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible depicts eternal life not as a present possession, but as a gift that is promised to believers by a loving, generous and kind God (who currently is the only one who possesses it). The Tree of Life that God planted in Eden was a symbol of that gift. God gave no prohibitions against the Tree of Life. Yet our ancestors, convinced that it was the *other* tree that would give them life, ignored the real opportunity until it was taken away from them.

A lawyer had once asked Jesus, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” and Jesus taught the parable of the Good Samaritan in reply.<sup>43</sup> The question that the lawyer asked was actually quite perceptive. He knew that eternal life was not a given — not an innate characteristic. He should also be given credit for asking Jesus, because Jesus through his sacrificial death has made eternal life a possibility for all humanity again. It is “through Christ alone (that the) doom is reversed, and man becomes capable of immortality.”<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, Jesus knew that the lawyer’s heart was not right, although his question was. The lawyer was still “desiring to justify himself,”<sup>45</sup> which is a way of avoiding God’s grace — the only means of justification. He was determined to get life by taking of the wrong tree. Jesus left him with a means of measuring whether he was truly living up to the law that he professed to live by.

In many other places, the New Testament speaks of salvation as the gift of eternal life.<sup>46</sup> To speak of eternal life or immortal-

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<sup>43</sup> Luke 10:25–37.

<sup>44</sup> James Hastings, ed. *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics Part 2* (New York: Kessinger Publishing, 2003), 548.

<sup>45</sup> Luke 10:29.

<sup>46</sup> John 10:28; 17:2; Acts 13:46, 48; Romans 5:21; Galatians 6:8; Titus 1:2; 3:7; 1 John 2:25; 5:11–12; Jude 21.

ity as an innate possession cheapens this doctrine. The teaching about eternal life as a gift from God is the heart of the gospel message. We humans know that we are facing death. The good news is not that death is an illusion, but that Jesus offers hope beyond it. That hope is the kingdom of God, ushered in by a resurrection.

### *The Kingdom and Eternal Life*

In Christ, the opportunity for eternal life (lost at Eden) has been restored. When our Lord taught about his return for judgment, he said he will call all the nations to him, and separate people from each other, the sheep from the goats. They will be separated according to their destiny. Those goats destined for permanent destruction will be separated from the sheep who are destined for permanent life.<sup>47</sup> Christ said it would be he who judges. Jesus calls this eternal life “the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world.”<sup>48</sup> By doing this, Jesus weaves together two biblical concepts into one fabric: the kingdom of God and the resurrection. Both concepts put together suggest that believers are destined to live forever, but unbelievers are not.

Jesus’ encounter with the rich young man afforded him another opportunity to talk about the kingdom and the eternal life it will bring.<sup>49</sup> Again, it is clear that both concepts are woven together into the same issue. The young man asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”<sup>50</sup> When Jesus’ answer did not suit him, the young man left. Jesus used that public rejection as an opportunity to teach about — the kingdom of God. He said “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Matthew 25:31–46.

<sup>48</sup> Matthew 25:34.

<sup>49</sup> Mark 10:17–31.

<sup>50</sup> Mark 10:17.

<sup>51</sup> Mark 10:23.

A Pharisee named Nicodemus was also privy to a discussion with Jesus on the same issues.<sup>52</sup> Jesus taught him that one has to be born again to see the kingdom of God.<sup>53</sup> He also said that he (the Son of Man) would be “lifted up” like the serpent in the wilderness was.<sup>54</sup> The story from the Old Testament (Numbers 21:4–9) is important to review. The people had sinned and the wages of that sin was death. They asked Moses to intercede for them, that God would take the serpents away. Instead, God instructed Moses to make a symbol of the curse itself, and set it up for all to see. Anyone bit by the serpents would be redeemed from the curse and gain life on the condition that they look on the symbol in faith.

Jesus taught Nicodemus that the Old Testament story was a simile for how God has chosen to deal with a rebellious, sinful people. Like the serpent in the wilderness, the cross is the symbol of death, the due punishment for our rebellion and sin. But God in his grace has offered a way to escape the punishment. Those who believe in Christ are reborn — not of the flesh (natural birth), but of the Holy Spirit (a supernatural birth). These can both see and enter the kingdom of God.<sup>55</sup> They will have eternal life.<sup>56</sup> They will be saved from the condemnation that will come upon all the rest.<sup>57</sup>

John (the Gospel author) comments later in such a way as to connect the ideas of the kingdom of God and eternal life. He says that “the Father loves the Son and had given all things into his hand.”<sup>58</sup> He is referring to the authority to rule the earth: the kingdom of God. In the next verse, he says “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not

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<sup>52</sup> John 3:1–21.

<sup>53</sup> John 3:3.

<sup>54</sup> John 3:14.

<sup>55</sup> John 3:3, 5.

<sup>56</sup> John 3:15–16.

<sup>57</sup> John 3:17–18.

<sup>58</sup> John 3:35.

see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”<sup>59</sup> Faith and obedience come together in the concept of the kingdom.

John also explains the details so that there is no mistake about what it means to receive eternal life by believing in Christ. Does it mean that believers will never die? No, it means that upon believing in Christ, believers will inherit the promise of eternal life in God’s kingdom. Believers continue to die, but that death is only temporary. The state of death will be interrupted by a resurrection. In chapter 6, John records Jesus talking about the promise of inherited life seven times.<sup>60</sup> But he is careful to also point out that this inheritance will come to pass by means of a resurrection, which will take place “on the last day.”<sup>61</sup> Believers possess eternal life now in the same way that a rich person’s young daughter possesses all the wealth she is due to inherit.

### *Immortality*

If there is an innate characteristic that gives hope to all humanity, it is not immortality. It is immortality. God created humans with the potential for immortality. It is that reality within each of us that drives us toward two goals that appear to be polar opposites. On the one hand, we see all human life as valuable (because God has invested it with immortality) and therefore seek to protect it. Every person on earth has a right to live, and that right should be protected. We believe in the sanctity of human life. Therefore, Christians should be on the front lines in the battle to protect the unborn, the aged, and all those who are in danger of being prematurely killed by a society that marginalizes them. This includes all those who are in danger of dying from starvation, war, domestic violence, or preventable disease due to government corruption and lack of accountability. To be pro life

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<sup>59</sup> John 3:36.

<sup>60</sup> John 6:27, 33, 35, 40, 47, 51, 53.

<sup>61</sup> John 6:39, 40, 44, 54.

is to seek to protect it in all its forms, because all human life is potentially immortal life.

On the other hand, this chance to gain immortality by entering God’s kingdom through obedience to and faith in Christ is worth risking this present life for. We believe in persevering in our faith “even to death”<sup>62</sup> if that is necessary. Our Lord said that “whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”<sup>63</sup> The believer who is confident of his standing in Christ is willing to risk his life as a witness to that confidence. Both the sanctity of life and Christian martyrdom stem from the fact that humans are immortal: we have potential for life beyond the grave.

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<sup>62</sup> Rev. 12:11.

<sup>63</sup> Matthew 10:39; 16:25.

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## **WHERE DID ALL THE SOULS GO?**

by Dr. Glenn Peoples

Souls are on the way out. Not just in our culture or in science, where some Christians may suspect “naturalism” as the culprit, but souls are on the way out of our Bibles. This is because of the ways in which our translations are getting better at conveying what was originally intended. In the King James Version of the Bible, translated in 1611 and the mainstay for Protestants until the 20th century, the English word “soul” appears 537 times. The New American Bible (1986) features the word 171 times, the NIV (1984) features it just 139 times, the NRSV (1989) features

it 252 times, but that includes the Deuterocanonical books, and even the ESV (2001), which hearkens back to older more literal translations, features the word just 281 times. The difference is not because of any difference in the manuscripts that these versions are using but because of a better understanding of what the Hebrew and Greek words actually mean.

## *People*

The word *nepshesh* is very often used in biblical Hebrew as something like a personal pronoun; words like “I,” “me,” “you,” “he,” “she” etc. In this way it means something like “self.” “My *nepshesh*,” although awkward because we’re hopping between two languages, would mean “my self” or “me.” “Your *nepshesh*” would mean “you,” and so on.

Older English translations, however, translate many examples like this with the word “soul.” There are many examples of this, so we’ll look at just a few. In Genesis 12, Abram and Sarai his wife went to stay in Egypt, and Abram asked his wife to say that she was his sister, as follows (KJV): “And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, ‘Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, “This is his wife”: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee.’” My *soul* shall live? In 1611 when this translation of the Bible was made, Christian readers who believed in souls didn’t think that the soul died with the body, so of course Abram’s soul would live, even if he was killed. Now look at how the NIV translates this verse: “Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you.” This is less literal, as “spared” does not answer to anything in the Hebrew, but the meaning is certainly more accurate, and is reflected in other modern translations. A literal translation would be something like “Say that you are my sister, so that it will be well with me for your sake, and I shall live because of you.”

In Genesis 19:20, Lot asks to flee to a nearby city before Sodom and Gomorah are destroyed, saying “Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live.” Because of the context we know what is really meant, but references to a “soul” certainly do not point us in the right direction. The NIV gives us “my life will be spared,” which is not quite literal, as the verb for “live” is gone altogether. Literally, Lot is saying that My X shall live (*chayah*). But still, our translations are managing to convey what the writer was saying without introducing the idea of a soul, something quite out of place here.

Leviticus 5 contains instructions about speaking up when you are a witness and you know that wrong has been done. Verse 1 is a typical example: “And if a soul sin, and hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness, whether he hath seen or known of it; if he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity” (KJV). Here even the ESV, traditional in its approach, purges the language of souls: “If anyone sins in that he hears a public adjuration to testify, and though he is a witness, whether he has seen or come to know the matter, yet does not speak, he shall bear his iniquity;” Instead of talking about souls, the writer is just talking, not specifically about me (where the KJV might say “my soul”) or you (where the KJV might say “thy soul”), but anyone.

Another well-known example where *nephesh* functions this way is in Ezekiel 18:4. Here, the prophet is saying that people should not blame former generations for the suffering that they now endure, and that God holds people accountable for their own actions. “Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.” Now why should God want to stress that the soul belongs to him? Doesn’t the body belong to God as well? And what’s this about souls dying for their sins? Do souls die? Here the NIV still uses the word “soul,” but the NRSV gives us this: “Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die.” The NRSV finds two meanings of *nephesh* here, both “life” and “person.”

Given the widely used idiom of “his *nephesh*” etc., the *nephesh* of the parent more likely just means “the parent.” But thankfully, “soul” is gone and the meaning is much clearer.

Shoe-horning a “soul” into passages like this can have bizarre, confusing, even highly misleading consequences. Think of Peter’s public speech on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. When describing how Jesus’ resurrection is an echo of the language of the Psalms, he quotes the psalmist, saying, according to the King James Version, “thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” Not only a soul, but a soul in hell! With a better appreciation of the Hebrew idiom (as this is a quote from the Hebrew Scripture) as well as a better translation of *hades*, here translating *sheol* or the grave, the NIV offers the reader something far more helpful: “you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.” In context of course this makes much more sense, because Peter here contrasts Jesus with King David, who is still in his physical grave (2:29), whereas Jesus is not, because he was raised from the dead.

### ***Creatures***

Sometimes, the word “soul” in our older translations is really an example where the writer was trying to refer to a creature, whether a human creature or a different creature (we call them animals, which, interestingly, is closely related to the Latin word *anima*, which is also translated “soul”). The first example of this is a striking inconsistency that existed in older translations in the creation narratives in Genesis. Historically there has been a widely held view among Christian theologians that while humans have souls, animals do not (clearly these people have never been greeted by an adoring dog). This theological point of view spilled over into the way Bible translators approached the creation of Adam in Genesis 2 and the creation of the other creatures in Genesis 1.

In the King James Version, browse through Genesis 1 and look at the creation of the animals and the sea creatures. You

won't see the word "soul" appear once. When you see the creation of the animals in Genesis 1:20–25, you see this:

*And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day. And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.*

Now read on a little further — still in the KJV — to the creation of Adam in Genesis 2:7. There, after God forms Adam from the dust and breathes the breath of life into him, Adam becomes “a living soul.” That’s the first occurrence of the word “soul” in the KJV, but it is not the first occurrence of the Hebrew word *nephesh*. The “creatures” in chapter 1 — the sea creatures and land animals — there are all referred to in the same way as Adam in Hebrew, *nephesh*. Why did the translators choose to call the animals “creatures” but Adam a “soul” when they were translating the same word in each instance? I think we know why. This was a case of theological presuppositions seeping through into the finished translation. People didn’t think of animals as having souls, so they were called “creatures.” Humans have souls, the translators thought, so they used the word “soul.” It’s still awkward that even this skewed translation said that Adam “became” a living soul, suggesting that this physical entity made from dust and made alive by the breath of God is a soul, but that aside, this inconsistency should never have arisen. Modern translations have put things right here, telling us in Genesis 2:7 that Adam became “a living being” (NIV, NRSV) or “living creature” (ESV).

So for example, Numbers 19:13 (KJV) gives instructions concerning “Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead” without ritually purifying themselves ... ” “Body” here is *nephesh*, which is not at all what the word means, but in context gets the point across. Is it a dead “creature”? In this case probably not. This is probably a case where the “nephesh of John” just means John, but in this case John is dead. Touching the *nephesh* of a person who is dead, then, just means touching a person who is dead. At least the translators managed to keep “soul” out of this one.

### ***Life***

Having the words for a person, me, you or creature, translated as “soul,” is a problem mostly confined to English translations of the Old Testament. But there is a common example that affects both the Old and New Testaments, namely examples where the writer is trying to write about a person’s life (or an animal’s life for that matter). Not the life that a person lives (where a “life” may be, say, eight years long), but the life a person has, that stuff that keeps them from being dead. Here too, at times, translators have dragged in the idea of a soul — although less often, thankfully.

Luke 12:20 is a memorable example like this, where Jesus tells a story of a man who accumulates goods for himself to live a comfortable life, only for God to say to him, “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.” Modern translations understand this simply to refer to a person giving up their life and losing all their goods: “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you” (NIV). Here the Greek word is *psyche* (ψυχή), which is used to translate *nephesh* into Greek.

### ***The need for change***

The changes — improvements, I am convinced — that modern translations have made were necessary ones. A much more

holistic view of human beings is biblical and a dualistic picture of immaterial souls living in material bodies is not biblical. Older translations and their use of the word “soul” sometimes obscured this fact, and our modern translations — whatever other flaws we might think they have — better reflect the intent of the biblical writers in this regard.

When I was introduced to the biblical, holistic view of human persons — and since then as well — a number of holistically minded people coped with the older language of “souls” in the Bible by accepting it and explaining whenever they used that language that they don’t mean what other people mean when they use the same language. As a result, we find ourselves saying things like: “It’s not that we *have* a soul. Instead, according to the Bible I *am* a soul, and so are you.” “Biblically speaking, your soul is your life.”

I can understand people doing this, but I no longer speak this way, nor do I think it is helpful. If we had no choice but to accept “soul” as an English word used in all these instances in our Bibles, then we would need to offer explanations like this. The trouble is, there’s a pre-existing meaning of “soul,” and the truth is that we just don’t believe in those things. When English Bibles were being translated by Wycliffe, Tyndale and then the translators of the King James Bible, the readers of the text already had a view of what the soul is. We know this because we have a wealth of theological writing from that time, and people just didn’t use the word “soul” to refer to our life, neither did they say things like “we don’t have a soul, we are a soul.” Instead they generally understood the word to refer to an immaterial part of us added to our body, and which may survive the death of the body.

In the same century in which the King James Bible was translated, the Westminster Confession of Faith was written (1647). In that confession, chapter 32, we are told that “The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption; but their souls (which neither die nor sleep), having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them.” Even early, in the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), we read that “not only my soul

after this life shall be immediately taken up to Christ its head; but also, that this my body, being raised by the power of Christ, shall be reunited with my soul, and made like unto the glorious body of Christ” (question 57). It is just not helpful — and was not helpful — to sally forth into this world of English speakers using the word “soul” — a word they already understand — in a way that means something quite different, where we have other words perfectly capable of getting the meaning across. English speakers in the seventeenth century were quite capable of saying “myself,” “living creature” and “life” without talking about souls — but they talked about souls because they believed in souls.

We may as well simply acknowledge that because this is what English speakers usually mean by soul, *we do not believe in souls*. It makes our communication so much simpler when we don't have to say “Now, I'm going to say that I believe in something that you say you believe in, but then I'm going to tell you that when I say I believe in that thing, I really mean something completely different from what you mean.” Given what people generally mean when they say “soul,” it is *not* true that “according to the Bible, I am a soul.” This just invites confusion when people reply “yes, I agree. I am a soul, and I live inside a body.” Biblically speaking I am a living creature, as are other living creatures like you and your cat. Unlike some other living creatures (for example, your cat), God relates to us in a unique way, wants to reconcile us to himself, and become one of us in Christ, dying for us and rising again to give us new life. Similarly, given what most people mean by “soul,” it is not true that according to the Bible, my soul is my life. Biblically speaking, I do not need a soul in order to have life. The changes we are now seeing should have been made long ago, but as the saying goes — better late than never.

### ***Overdue changes***

The change away from the more archaic and less accurate English translation of “soul” and toward words that more properly convey the meaning of the text is a very positive move, re-

moving one more barrier between the modern reader and the mind of the author. But the task is not complete yet, and there are still examples where more consistency is required in this reform of older translations. Sometimes the state of modern translations is very mixed, and although some get it right on one instance, most do not. It is never easy to see why a translation uses older language, but undoubtedly it sometimes happens because particular turns of phrase have become part of our vocabulary. Who is not familiar with that challenging question: “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36) Some translations have remedied this one, but many have not — quite possibly because it is so well-known. In context, though, it should be obvious that “life” is a better translation. Here is an inconsistency that some translations perpetuate, beginning with the prior verse: “For whosoever will save his life (*psuche*) shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life (*psuche*) for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul (*psuche*)?” The word is used three times in the same breath, but given a different translation. In light of wider biblical theology, a person does not lose their “soul,” as though their soul is lost into the pits of hell forever. Instead, salvation truly is a matter of losing — or gaining — life forever. The NIV and the ESV, frustratingly, follow the KJV in this inconsistency, giving the misleading impression that the Jesus is talking about life on the one hand and the “soul” on the other, when in reality he is talking about life the whole time.

One further example is a common one when hearing about how the Bible supposedly teaches a dualism of body and soul. In John’s Revelation, he describes the following (Revelation 6:9–11):

*When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the people slaughtered because of God’s word and the testimony they had. They cried out with a loud voice: “Lord, the One who is holy and true, how long until You judge and avenge our blood from those who live on the earth?” So a white robe was given to each of them, and they were told to rest a little while longer until the number*

would be completed of their fellow slaves and their brothers, who were going to be killed just as they had been.

I have quoted here from the *Holman Christian Standard Bible*, which as far as I can tell is unique among contemporary English translations for *not* using the word “souls” here. Other translations read similar to the ESV: “... I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God ...” The impression created by the majority of English translations is unmistakable: These people were killed, and while their bodies are dead, their souls are now elsewhere, calling out for justice.

What a difference one word makes! Reading the *Holman Christian Standard Bible*’s translation does not use the word soul, so that the impression is quite a different one. The fact that these people have been killed should not make any difference to the question of what “the *psuchai* of” means. In fact, we have examples in the Hebrew Scripture where this language is used of people who have died. Recall the example we saw in Numbers 19:13, where touching a dead body is referred to as touching “the *nephesh* of” a person who has died. There the phrase simply means to touch someone who has died (where “the *nephesh* of John” just means “John”). Whether a person is still alive or not really makes no difference, because the purpose of the phrase “the *nephesh/psuche* of” is not to tell us which part of a person we are talking about. Instead, the phrase is used to tell us *who* we are talking about. For example, if the question is: “Who is it?” then the answer might be “he *nephesh* or Jonathan” or “My *nephesh* or “the *psuchai* of those who went to Jerusalem,” or, as in this case, “the *psuchai* of those who had been martyred.”

True, the martyrs under the altar (or “at the foot of the altar,” as some translators say, making the parallel to Leviticus 4:7 clear, where the blood of the bullock is poured at the foot of the altar) are depicted as being alive, which some might take to depict a kind of *disembodied* life after death — because they have been killed. But this is a rhetorical device, rather than a literal truth. The martyrs are not out there somewhere under an altar, nor, in this vision, are they depicted as disembodied (on the contrary,

they are given a white robe to wear!). Instead, they are depicted as being alive so that their voice in this vision can be heard. If they could speak, *this is what they would say*. A number of commentators have made the comparison between the martyrs crying out to God here in John's vision, and the blood of Abel, as God describes it in Genesis 4:10, crying out to God after he was murdered by Cain.

In neither cases are these literal truths, but they convey literal truths to us: Injustice has been done, and for the sake of the victim, things must be put right. All that aside, in just the same way that our translators have made other corrections to previous translations of verses like Acts 2:27, "souls" need to disappear from Revelation 6:9. Other translations need to follow the Holman Christian Standard Bible here. Appreciating the Hebrew idiom that lies behind John's description, this verse should read: "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne."

### ***How far should we go?***

Should the word "soul" disappear from the Bible altogether? If I'm honest, I have to say that I wouldn't miss it. To English readers today it has a meaning that conveys a patently false view of human nature. Because the purpose of English translations is to faithfully convey what the biblical writer said, translations that convey an unbiblical view of human nature are wanting. The difficulty is in coming up with alternatives, and while I am sure this can be done, it may take some creative thinking. "Praise the Lord, Oh my soul." We know what it means: The Psalmist is calling on himself to praise the Lord. But how do we say it in a way that retains the poetry while getting the meaning right? "Praise the Lord, Oh myself." This gets the right meaning across, but it's frankly ugly by comparison.

Unless somebody comes up with an elegant way of making the change, we may just have to grit our teeth and live with some

less than ideal translations. We can be thankful, however, that biblical translations are slowly but surely losing their references to “souls,” meaning that we have less explaining to do of why these verses don’t mean what they appear to mean to many readers. Baby steps are fine, as long as they are in the right direction.

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## AN ANALYSIS OF 1 CORINTHIANS 15:44 by Pastor Corey McLaughlin

If the entrance to Dante’s Hell reads, “Abandon all hope, ye who enter in,” then we might say that at the threshold of Paul’s theology it reads, “Take up all hope in the power of Christ’s resurrection, all ye who enter in.” Since for Paul without the resurrection of Christ, and consequently the resurrection of the dead, our faith is worthless and our hope in vain (1 Corinthians 15:12–19; 29–34).

First Corinthians 15 is Paul’s longest most sustained argument about one topic in all of his writings. It is also one of his most complex. He begins in vv. 1–4 with the gospel and then casts special support for the resurrection in vv. 5–11; recounting all of the witnesses that saw the resurrected Christ. Believing that he has substantiated the bodily resurrection of Jesus both by way of citing what he παραλαμβάνω (“received” v. 3)<sup>1</sup> and what

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<sup>1</sup> Paul uses this verb three other times in 1 Corinthians to describe the trustworthy nature of what was received. Namely, the teaching he received about communion in 11:23, the gospel the Corinthians received from Paul in 15:1 (also Galatians 1:9, 12), and lastly, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ in 15:3 (cf. Philippians 4:9; Colossians 2:6; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 4:1; 2 Th. 3:6).

was confirmed by eye witnesses (vv. 5–7), he now moves on to challenge the Corinthians for doubting such a historical event (vv. 12–19).

The chiastic structure from vv. 12–34 is hard to miss: (A) If there is no resurrection of the dead then ... (vv. 12–19); (B) But Christ has been raised (vv. 20–28); (C) If there is no resurrection of the dead then ... (vv. 29–34). The main point obviously being that Christ has indeed been raised from the grave. The breakdown may be shown more thoroughly below:

A If there is no resurrection of the dead then ... (12)

1. Not even Christ has been raised (13)
  - a. *Consequently ...*
    - (1) Our preaching and your faith are both vain (14).
    - (2) We are found to be false witnesses of God (15).
    - (3) Your faith is worthless/are still in your sins (17).
      - (a) *As a result*, the dead have perished (18).
      - (b) *As a result*, we are to be pitied (19).

B But Christ has been raised from the dead (20)

1. the first fruits of those who are asleep (21)
2. *This makes since because ...*
  - a. In Adam all die, so in Christ all shall be made alive (22).
  - b. But each in his own order (23)
    - (1) First Christ
    - (2) Then those who are his at his coming
    - (3) Then the end, the kingdom, abolish all rule (24)
      - (a) This will happen because it must (25).
      - (b) The last enemy will be death (26).
      - (c) Clarification why he must rule (27–28)

C If there is no resurrection of the dead then ...

1. What will those do who are baptized for the dead? (29)
2. Why are we in danger every hour? (30–31)

3. What do human motives profit me? (32a)
4. Let us eat, drink, for tomorrow we die (32b).
5. Bad company corrupts good morals (33).
6. Become sober minded and stop sinning (34).

But Paul's point is not demonstrated beyond a reasonable doubt just yet. Though it is certainly weighty, he answers yet another foreseen objection to the resurrection; but this time it is not the resurrection of Christ but of believers. Paul asks, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of a body do they come?" Since this question navigates us through the next section (vv. 35–49) we must determine at the forefront whether it is in fact one question or two. In other words, is Paul asking the same question in different words or posing two distinct questions? Here the usually helpful examination of syntax, grammar and context are but two-faced friends, since they can be mustered for either position.<sup>2</sup> The author prefers a mediating position that sees an element of synthetic parallelism involved in Paul's words; thus the second question assumes the prior but moves beyond it. Therefore they are not two distinct questions but neither are they the same exact question. The issue is one of emphasis.

It should be seen from Paul's immediate response in the following verse (αφρων!) that he does not understand this as a sincere inquisition on the nature of the resurrection but as a possible Corinthian rebuttal to it.<sup>3</sup> It is here where his attention turns for the next 16 verses (vv. 35–49) and where we must turn our attention if we are to make sense of the resurrection body in v. 44.

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<sup>2</sup> πῶς may point to a second question that furthers the first (so LSJ offer Eurip. Hel. 1543; Plato Tim. 22b) but others argue that it is more natural to see two distinct questions (so Wright 2003: 342). Some argue from the context that only one question is in mind (So Hays 1997: 269f), while others contend that the context offers a two-stage answer to two questions (So Wright 2003: 342).

<sup>3</sup> Also, Wattson, "Rhetorical Strategy," in *Rhetoric*, 245 n. 50 cited in Thiselton, notes that πῶς often functions to point out Corinthian assumptions or reject them altogether.

Before we do, however, a pressing question confronts us: What caused the Corinthians to deny the resurrection of the dead? To that we can offer only little more than speculation since Paul only tells us that in fact some were denying such a thing (v. 12). We cannot be too hasty here. The Corinthians were denying the resurrection of the dead, yet we cannot conclude that they were also denying life after death or even some other form of resurrection.<sup>4</sup> Whatever the case, Paul was sufficiently concerned to correct their misunderstanding.

It is increasingly customary among recent scholars to bypass an earlier proposal that the Corinthians believed in, and actively lived out, an “over-realized eschatology”<sup>5</sup> for the view that they were mixing Christian teaching with blatant paganism (most notably Stoicism).<sup>6</sup> Since the former enjoys the support of the most outstanding modern commentator on 1 Corinthians (i.e. Anthony Thiselton) it may be a bit more prudent to see these as competing theories.

A proverb says, “It is not good to have zeal without knowledge” (19:2 NIV). The Corinthians excelled at the former and failed at the latter. They saw themselves as already partaking of the age to come (cf. 4:8). Hence, the devaluing of the present body (6:12–20, after all what does it matter what we do in this body since we have the full protection of the Spirit?), the practice

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<sup>4</sup> Paul’s argument in v. 19 (“if we have hoped in Christ in this life ... we are to be pitied”) may seem to imply such a notion, but two things must be considered: (1) 1 Corinthians 15 is first and foremost polemical and must be understood within the context of the overall debate (which we do not possess); (2) For Paul, placing hope in a false view of the resurrection is just as ghastly as failing to believe in one altogether. Since Paul would see a false view as a wrong view he can conclude that they are actually not placing their hope in the resurrection (as outlined by him) but in this life only.

<sup>5</sup> Carson, Moo and Morris 1992: 281 contend that the Corinthians believed that they had already been raised in their present spiritual existence. If this were the case there would obviously be no need for a future bodily resurrection. This may explain Paul’s intensity to demonstrate that in fact God does give us a body quite different from our present earthly vessels.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Hays 1999; Wright 2003.

of attending pagan festivals, perhaps believing they were shielded by the Spirit associated with the Lord's table (8–10), and the overabundance of Spiritual gifts (14), amongst other things.

Where did the Corinthians' false theological teaching come from? It is true that some associate the error with various wisdom cults that infiltrated Hellenistic Judaism?<sup>7</sup> Though this remains a possibility, we must also face the fact that Paul's audience is not decisively Jewish but overwhelmingly Gentile (8:1–10:22 best fits a Gentile audience since Jews found it abhorrent to worship "idols").<sup>8</sup> In addition, Paul himself tells us that wisdom was the goal of the *Greeks* while *Jews* sought for miracles or miraculous signs (1:22).

Others are so brazen as to claim Paul as the instigator of the problems.<sup>9</sup> Such a premise rests on the assumption that Paul's eschatology changed. It also reconstructs the relationship between the Corinthians and Paul using speculation as the primary vehicle.

The answer may best be couched in eschatological terms though we cannot deny that some interaction may have taken place between the Corinthians and various wisdom philosophies in the Greco-Roman world.<sup>10</sup> We therefore contend, like Thiselton, that the Corinthian diagnosis is an over-realized eschatology.<sup>11</sup>

**Verses 36–38:** Paul rejects the theoretical objection with an emotionally fused ἀφρων σὺ (You Fools!),<sup>12</sup> thereby denying that the very body we shed at death is the one we receive at the resurrection. Such a refutation also comes on the heel of a stern rebuke at the end of the previous thought to "stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God" (v. 34; ἀγνωσίαν is better translated "ig-

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<sup>7</sup> Davis 1984.

<sup>8</sup> Paul also points out their pagan roots in 6:9–11; 8:7; and 12:1–3; again, Gentiles are the best fit.

<sup>9</sup> J.C. Hurd 1983: 213–296.

<sup>10</sup> So Fee 1987: 14.

<sup>11</sup> *Realized Eschatology at Corinth*, NTS 24 (1978): 510–526.

<sup>12</sup> Note: The personal pronoun is implied in the vocative but Paul chooses to bring it out in order to be even more emphatic.

norant” of God). The very biblical definition of the “fool” is one who does not recognize God (Psalm 14:1) and is antithetical to him (Proverbs 14:6).

As many point out, the second half of the verse echoes Jesus’ sentiment in John 12:24 (though they are both making different points). But here a divine passive asserts itself making a more explicit translation: “Fool! God does not bring what you sow to life unless it dies.”<sup>13</sup> The illustration from sowing seed is a controlling one throughout the entire passage. The initial image is not hard to grasp. When a seed stops being a seed and starts growing into something else, it dies as a seed and comes to life as a plant.

A second illustration from sowing seed is elucidated in **verse 37**. Paul highlights that when someone plants a tree in the ground they do not plant an entire tree but only a bare grain that will one day turn into a tree. The same is true of the resurrection body.<sup>14</sup> There is *continuity* between the two bodies in one sense; like the continuity between a seed and its full growth; and in another sense there is *discontinuity*; like the difference between a seed and its full growth. The singular analogy points to both realities at the same time. This explicates Paul’s point quite well; the body that dies in the grave is not the body we are raised with at the eschaton, and yet we nonetheless remain in some way, who we really and truly are.

**Verse 38** is the main point behind this illustration. It is not simply that there is continuity, but that God is the one who enables, insures and protects that continuity. He gives each seed a body as he “wished.” The true force of καθως ηθελησεν is better expressed as “just as he determined” (NIV), or even better, “just as he has purposed” (the aorist tense highlighting past action).<sup>15</sup> God’s choice of resurrection bodies is done orderly and with-

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<sup>13</sup> ζωοποιεῖται is a present passive indicative 3rd person singular.

<sup>14</sup> Paul’s use of σωμα here foreshadows where the rest of the discussion is heading.

<sup>15</sup> cf. 12:11

out confusion (important themes in the Corinthian correspondence).

**Verses 39–41:** In the following verses Paul offers two complementary analogies to help clarify the resurrection body. In the first instance all σαρξ is not the same σαρξ. This is substantiated when we realize that humans have one kind of flesh while beasts, birds and fish possess another, respectively (v. 39). All God's creatures are not created the same. 62% of the New Testament occurrences of this word appear in Paul's writings.<sup>16</sup> It is important that we recognize the multifaceted nature behind just such a term.<sup>17</sup> Though it may carry sinful connotations (e.g. Romans 7:5, 18, 25), it may also simply refer to the composition of the body (Colossians 1:22; 2:11); its primary role here.

If we continue to extend his illustration, we arrive at Paul's big idea: if everything is created differently, then it stands to reason that the resurrection body will also be categorically different than the one we now possess. This is not some form of divine C.P.R. that will simply resuscitate believers, but a new creation, in a new environment, under the rule of a new world order. N.T. Wright is correct when he observes that though Paul is thoroughly Jewish, no Jewish writings had yet spoken of the resurrection in these terms; making Paul's exposition a "striking innovation."<sup>18</sup>

The second analogy is clearly seen in the night sky (vv. 40–41). There are heavenly σώματα (i.e. celestial bodies) and earthly σώματα (i.e. terrestrial bodies), each with its own glory. The use of σώματα is accurate according to the time period and it portends the forthcoming discussion about the resurrection body (σώμα). But even within these heavenly and earthly bodies each

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<sup>16</sup> Ninety-one of 147 occurrences to be exact. The adjectival form, σαρκικός, and σαρκινός, are almost exclusive to Paul, with the exception of one occurrence each in Hebrews (7:16) and 1 Peter (2:11).

<sup>17</sup> cf. Thiselton, "The Meaning of σαρξ in 1 Cor. 5:5, ..." SJT 26 (1973): 204–228. The most important characteristic to remember about this term is that it is a "polymorphous concept" hence its meaning is inevitably multifarious and context dependent.

<sup>18</sup> Wright 2003: 342.

continues to share its very own, unique δοξα. How do they do so? Their δοξα must be understood in terms of their function. The sun offers light and warmth, yet it is no more important than the moon that controls the tide. Both are equally important and exhibit an individual glory. They are each glorious because each is the most suitable for its environment (either heavenly or earthly).<sup>19</sup> If then, God so created diversity according to function, then it also makes sense that we will be given resurrection bodies to function in our new surroundings in our eternal home.<sup>20</sup> This is the main point from vv. 38–41; the ability of God to create variegated “bodies” suitable for their environment.

**Verses 42–44:** Here Paul draws the most salient conclusion from the previous thought (vv. 39–41) as well as the overall discussion (vv. 35–38). The οὕτως beginning verse 42 may rightfully, therefore, be loaded with its full meaning from these verses. That is, in the same way that a seed must die before it can bare grain, so the physical body must die before it can be transformed into the resurrection body; and in the same way that God gives a body just as he purposed, he will also give us a body according to his wisdom; and just as all flesh is not the same, so the resurrection body will be different from the earthly and retain its own glory. Following this comparison Paul offers a variety of words for comprehending the resurrection body:

φθορα ... αφαρσια is usually translated “perishable ... imperishable” (NASB, NIV, ESV, RSV, NRSV), or, “corruption ...

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<sup>19</sup> Some have suggested that “bodies” to denote planetary movement is anachronistic and out of line with ancient thought that sometimes saw “heavenly beings” as embodied in the heavens (e.g. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 117–120; 123–136; also Meyer and Findlay). Though the possibility of angelic bodies cannot be excluded (maybe Matthew 22:10 and Luke 20:36) it is far from definitive. The immediate context argues for the term “σωμα” to be understood as that which is described in the next verse; that is, celestial and terrestrial “bodies.”

<sup>20</sup> Sir. 43:1–10 may assist in clarifying “glory” in a similar way. Based on this text Thiselton 2000: 1270–71 concludes that what makes the sun impressive is different than what makes the moon impressive, and yet both retain an individual glory because they are doing what God decreed.

incorruption” (KJV, NKJV) thus maintaining a contrast of duration. The same motif underlies vv. 48–49. The “earthly” exists in a state of corruptible pandemonium while the “heavenly” enjoys, or will enjoy, incorruptible peace, prosperity and purpose.

Anthony Thiselton argues persuasively for understanding the contrast in terms of the alpha privative. He defines  $\phi\theta\omicron\rho\alpha$  as “decreasing capacities and increasing weaknesses, issuing in exhaustion and stagnation,” otherwise known as decay. The LXX employ’s two Hebrew words to translate  $\phi\theta\omicron\rho\alpha$ : *shachat*, which indicates destruction, termination, mutilation, and in certain forms to pervert or corrupt morally; and *chebel*, which exhibits a semantic domain from vapor to vanity. If we weigh the force of the alpha privative correctly then the semantic contrast with *shachat*, contends Thiselton, would not be permanence or everlasting duration but “ethical, aesthetic and psychosocial flourishing and abundance, even perhaps perfection, and certainly fullness of life.”<sup>21</sup> The semantic antithesis to *chebel* is best expressed as “purpose” (if something is vain it has no meaning, if it has purpose it has meaning), or as Thiselton suggests, “purposive progression of dynamic life-processes, in which satisfaction and delight is based on what is substantial and solid.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore, characterizing the resurrection body as merely “incorruptible” or “imperishable” thus indicating that no corruption takes place and that the body does not perish fails to go far enough. We must understand the resurrection body as the very *reversal* of decay and vanity, hence, as full abundant purposeful life. This is not just living forever (i.e. immortality) but living forever in a state of perfect and purposeful existence.

$\alpha\tau\iota\mu\iota\alpha$  ...  $\delta\omicron\zeta\eta$  are not the initial pair we think of for contrast, rather, the opposite of “dishonor” is “honor.” Paul writes the contrast as “dishonor ... glory,” a far more lofty sentiment that continues his theme from vv. 40–41 and is especially linked to Jew-

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<sup>21</sup> Thiselton 2000: 1272.

<sup>22</sup> Thiselton 2000: 1272.

ish eschatology.<sup>23</sup> Since the end or goal of all Christian activity is the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31), it follows that our individual “end” will likewise culminate in glory to God.<sup>24</sup>

Paul means to intentionally load *δοξα* here with resurrection connotations. This is evident from the overall context as well as his discussion in Philippians 3:18–21, where he describes earthly *δοξα* as manifesting “shame” (v. 19) while the apex of heavenly *δοξα* is conformity to Christ; specifically conformity to “*τω σωματι της δοξης αυτου*” (“the body of his glory” v. 21).<sup>25</sup>

*Ασθενεια* ... *δυναμαι* are fairly straightforward. The body is “sown in weakness and raised in power. ...” *ασθενεια* highlights physical infirmities (Luke 5:15; 8:2; 13:11–12; John 5:5) but is also used by Paul to bring attention to his present state of weakness, especially in contrast to the power of God (2 Cor. 11:30; 12:5; 12:9, 10; 13:4). In the pre-resurrection state God’s *δυναμις* is revealed in and through weakness (2 Cor. 12:9) but at the resurrection of the dead such weakness will give way to the full *δυναμις* of God (2 Cor. 13:4).

Humanity is *ασθενεια* in terms of physicality (our bodies break down), morality (we fight to make the right decisions for the right reasons), and spirituality (we are constantly at war with our “old” self). As decay is reversed we gain strength, power and mastery over each of these categories. We are able to overcome ourselves in order to better serve our Lord. With this newly accompanied control and power what else will we be capable of in the paradise of God? We will live for God unhindered by any

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<sup>23</sup> Consider for instance Dan. 12:3; 1 Enoch 62:15; 105:11, 12; 2 Bar. 51:10.

<sup>24</sup> Note that the only other time these words come into proximity is 2 Cor. 6:8 where Paul reminds the Corinthians that in all situations we are to be servants of God, “in glory and dishonor.” Thus, whether in this earthly tent or the one to come we serve Christ our king and God.

<sup>25</sup> Instead of “dishonor ... honor” Paul characterizes the present body as *ταπεινωσις* (humiliation) and the future one as conformity to Christ’s resurrection body. Such a notion is likewise imbedded in the terms here, and may be brought out by dropping “dishonor ... honor” and opting instead for “humiliation ... glory.”

roadblock, disease and moral corruption that this life bears. We are raised by his power and we will live by his power.

Now for the first time in **verse 44**, Paul mentions the human *σῶμα* explicitly (note its lack in vv. 42–43).<sup>26</sup> Of the 91 times employed in the Pauline corpus, 46 occur in 1 Corinthians, indicating an important motif. It would be wrong to think that the *σῶμα* is merely physical. It is certainly no less, but as Dunn contends, the *σῶμα* is “the embodiment of the person.”<sup>27</sup> Consider, for example, 1 Corinthians 6:13–20 where Paul uses *σῶμα* eight times. Most fit the idea of a physical body but can we not delve deeper when he says, “... your bodies are members of Christ” (v. 15)? Are we only “physical” members of Christ or is it much more? And in Romans 12:1 Paul commands that we offer our *σῶμα* as a living sacrifice. Does he envision the sacrifice of limbs or the sacrifice of the entire self upon the altar of God? In both of these examples the physical element is surpassed by a relational one.<sup>28</sup> This is a vital point for understanding the new resurrection bodies given to believers at the eschaton. It will not be a mere upgrade of the “physical body” but a radical transformation of the “self” and of our relationship to God.<sup>29</sup> This will become more palpable as the discussion continues.

Paul refers to the *σῶμα ψυχικόν* prior to resurrection and a *σῶμα πνευματικόν* in its post resurrection state. Is this dichotomy between *ψυχικόν/πνευματικόν* best understood as a “natural vs. spiritual” distinction (so NKJV, NAS, NIV, NLT) or a permutation between the “physical” and the “spiritual” (so NRS)? The

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<sup>26</sup> In Homer *σῶμα* always refers to the dead body (BibleWorks Liddell-Scott Lexicon) but Paul never uses it this way.

<sup>27</sup> Dunn 1998: 56.

<sup>28</sup> For physical function see Rom. 1:24; 1 Cor. 7:4; 1 Cor. 5:3; 2 Cor. 5:6, 8; 2 Cor. 12:2-3; Gal. 6:17. For the relational concept that the soma is the embodiment of the person see Dunn 1998: 58–61.

<sup>29</sup> Note that the title of the paper is not “This Old House: Renovating the Soma,” but “This Old House: *Rebuilding* the Soma.” Garland wants to see more continuity in the image than Paul intends, insisting that the new resurrection body is actually “put on over” our old bodies.

question is an important one since the latter carries an implication the former does not; namely, that the “spiritual” body that is raised is not “physical.” Paul’s prior discussion in 2:14–15 will prove formidable for clarifying his intention here in 15:44.

A number of contrasts are seen in chapter 2 but they all relate to one another. The consistent motif is that worldly wisdom cannot stand before the great edifice of Spiritual wisdom that comes from God (i.e. wisdom that comes through the Holy Spirit). This is easily seen in the contrasts between “persuasive words of wisdom” and “demonstration of the Spirit” (1:14), wisdom that belongs to “the rulers of this age” (v. 6) and wisdom that is “not of this age” (v. 6), and between “the spirit of the world” and “the Spirit of God” (v. 12). Now, in verse 14, Paul makes the definitive statement about those who possess the wisdom of this world and those who receive the wisdom of God. He claims that a “ψυχικός person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”

Since context limits the semantic domain, it is clear that the best rendition is not a “physical person” but a “worldly person.” By this we do not mean simply a person who aligns themselves with worldly philosophy and principles but a person devoid of spiritual enlightenment, in the biblical sense.<sup>30</sup> This is a person who lives on a human level without giving any credence to the Spirit of God. For all intents and purposes, a ψυχικός person is a typical, ordinary, normal, natural person devoid of the Spirit of God (cf. 3:1).

The σωμαψυχικόν spoken of in 15:44 then, is a worldly body, that is, a body confined to and created for this world. It is a natural body in the sense that it is ordinary; what every human possesses. Paul says that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the king-

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<sup>30</sup> The Gen. 2:7 background cannot be ignored here. Adam was created first and then animated by the power of God to become a “living being” (of animals as well in 1:20, 24, 30). Humankind is animated by a soul, but Paul places the emphasis on the resurrection body in terms of it being animated by the Spirit of the living God and hence under its complete control.

dom of God” (v. 50). That which is unspiritual and born of the natural man cannot conceive of or be rightly prepared for life in the age to come. Only a body infused with the Spirit of God can be sustained in the kingdom of God. The contrast then is between a body animated by the Spirit of God (post resurrection) and the one we now possess controlled by the things of this world.<sup>31</sup> Or more specifically, a body controlled by the psyche; a soulish body; attached to earth and normal human desires.<sup>32</sup>

There are variegated responses to the *σωμαπνευματικον*.<sup>33</sup> In the latter 1800s it was popular to envision it as a heavenly substance far surpassing our understanding of physicality.<sup>34</sup> Pinpointing the exact composition of the resurrection body, however, seems beyond the available data, and far displaced from Paul’s present arguments (i.e. composition is not as important as character).<sup>35</sup>

In the more popular realm the *σωμαπνευματικον* is often portrayed as a nonphysical entity. This is no doubt due in part from inaccurate translations (e.g. NRS), questionable linguistic science (e.g. Louw-Nida),<sup>36</sup> and the influence of ancient Greek currents that ebb and flow in our postmodern sea, continually reinforcing the dichotomy between the material and the spiritual.

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<sup>31</sup> As H.W. Robinson eloquently says, “Man is an animated body not an incarnated soul” (Murphy 1970: 93). We are presently under the control of the psyche but after the resurrection we will be given fully to the animation of the Spirit.

<sup>32</sup> Wright 2003: 347–356, esp. 350, agrees.

<sup>33</sup> Of the 24 occurrences, 15 present themselves in 1 Corinthians; usually at key junctures (i.e. 2:13–3:1; 12:1; 14:1, 37; 15:44–46). Most modern commentators believe it is a Corinthian term picked up by Paul and redefined.

<sup>34</sup> Pfleiderer, *Paulinism*: 1:201; also J. Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*, 2:535 and most recently Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 115–118. Contextually advocates of this view usually draw support from Paul’s cosmic analogy, keeping in mind the Greco-Roman background that allowed for the dead to become stars, hence the resurrection body may resemble just such “heavenly bodies.”

<sup>35</sup> Note vv. 42–43 in the commentary section above. Paul does not describe what the body is made of but how the body is to function.

<sup>36</sup> Louw-Nida describes it as “non-physical” but offer no evidence except the text in question (Bible Works Lexicon, 5220, b.79.3).

Lastly, the view this author ascribes to, the resurrection body is a body controlled by, not the natural-worldly appetites, but by Spiritual appetites and desires<sup>37</sup> — that is, a body under the complete control of the Holy Spirit of God. For if we are his temple in this imperfect life, how much more will we be in the life to come (6:12–20); certainly we cannot be less.<sup>38</sup>

This is further buttressed when we consider the almost exclusive use of πνευματικῶν in the Pauline corpus to refer to things associated with the Spirit of God:<sup>39</sup> for example, Spiritual gifts (Rom. 1:11), the Law (Rom. 7:14, which comes from the Spirit), Spiritual wisdom (Col. 1:9; 1 Cor. 2:14–15), Spiritual people (1 Cor. 2:13, 15, 3:1; 14:37; Gal. 6:1), and the totality of living according to “the things of the Spirit” (Rom. 15:27; 1 Cor. 9:11).<sup>40</sup>

It should be evident that Paul’s explanation of eschatological somatic existence cannot be translated with one word. To do so would be like stuffing a five-star gourmet meal into a McDonalds’ bag. We must be diligent to err on the side of accuracy rather than efficiency. The only translation that even attempts such a feat is the translation of v. 44 in the Jerusalem Bible: “When it is sown it embodies the soul, when it is raised it embodies the spirit. If the soul has its own embodiment, so does the spirit have its own embodiment.”

Paul introduced the resurrection argument with the gospel of Jesus Christ (15:1–4) and now turns to Jesus again, not as the one who offers good news but as the last Adam; α πνευμα ζωοποιου

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<sup>37</sup> Note the use of πνευματικοί in 2:14 and 3:1 carry this meaning.

<sup>38</sup> Barrett, *First Epistle*, 372; Thiselton 2000: 1278; Fee 1987: 785–790; Wright 2003: 347–356; all agree on the latter point.

<sup>39</sup> It only occurs elsewhere in 1 Peter 2:5. Its cognate noun, πνευμα, refers to the Spirit of God more than 100 times out of a total of 146 in the Pauline corpus (Dunn 1998: 76).

<sup>40</sup> Colin Brown 1979 v. 3: 706 notes 1 Cor. 10:3 as an exception since “spiritual” in that context is almost synonymous with “allegorical.” And of course Eph. 6:12 is not the Holy Spirit but evil spirits. There is little doubt that at times it may be more restrictive, for example when Paul speaks specifically of Spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:1; 14:1).

(life-giving spirit). If we are to grasp the *σωμαπνευματικον* we must comb through his remarks in 15:45–49.

**15:45–49:** The premise for the following argument is v. 44b (*if there is an ordinary/natural body there is also a spiritual body*). The οὕτως of v. 45 supports this observation since Paul is now concerned with proving that one necessitates the other. He quotes Genesis 2:7 from the LXX but adds some of his own interpretation specific to the Corinthian need (e.g. “first” and “last” are not present in the LXX). The Adam-Christ analogy was also used in v. 22 (*“For in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.”*) to highlight the natural order of things (i.e. death) and the very reversal of that order found in Christ (i.e. life).

A further connection is the vocabulary used to describe Adam and Christ. Both are the cognate nouns for the adjectives employed in v. 44 (*ψυχικον* and *πνευματικον*). Adam and Christ are then paradigmatic of the two kinds of bodies that exist: the natural-worldly one and the supernatural-heavenly one. As Fee points out, the first Adam was given a *ψυχη* and a *ψυχικον* body to go with it. The last Adam is a *πνευμα ζωοποιουν* and is likewise given its appropriate counterpart, a *πνευματικον* body.<sup>41</sup> Those who remain in Adam must necessarily die since the *ψυχικον* body will pass away, but those in Christ will live again since they receive life (v. 22) and consequently the body to enjoy that life; a *σωμαπνευματικον*.

As Paul continues to weave and bob his argument, he takes a few more jabs at the Corinthians’ over-zealous and over-realized eschatology in v. 46. He needs to make clear that they cannot enjoy the *πνευματικον*<sup>42</sup> now since the natural is first and the *πνευματικον* is still yet to be realized. The Corinthians must understand that they are still in the *σωμαψυχικον*, which patterns

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<sup>41</sup> Fee 1987: 789.

<sup>42</sup> Some contend that the referent here is to Jesus’ body. We, however, understand the neuter singular *πνευματικον* to be referring to the neuter singular *σωμα* of verse 44.

itself after Adam and can only be shed and reclothed in its proper order (v. 23, 46).

**Vv. 47–49** better explain the natural and the spiritual. Though some may be tempted to see in this an appeal to the origin of Adam (i.e. from the earth) and the origin of Christ (i.e. from heaven) the context simply drives straight through such a diversion. Paul is concerned with the resurrection soma, and what he says is perfectly consonant with what we have said thus far. The *σωμαψυχικον* is the natural-worldly body, patterned after Adam, and given to all humanity. It is “from the earth, earthy.” It belongs to the matrix of this age and is thus susceptible to all the ailments of its environment (v. 48). But the second man constitutes life in the kingdom of God and is thus “from heaven ... heavenly” (vv. 47 and 49). Those who share in this body also partake of the glorious kingdom of God (v. 48).<sup>43</sup> To be *ψυχικον* is to be earthy and to be *πνευματικον* is to be heavenly; to be *ψυχικον* is to be in Adam and to be *πνευματικον* is to be in Christ (v 49).

Since we will bear the image of our resurrected Lord we must probe one last dimension in order to grasp with some clarity the nature of the *σωμαπνευματικον*. What does Jesus’ resurrected body tell us, if anything, about the body we, too, will one day possess?

From the Gospel accounts we learn, (1) That Jesus is not initially recognized (John 20:15; 21:4; Luke 24:13–35); (2) that Jesus is able to pass through locked doors (John 20:19, 26) and even instantly disappear (Luke 24:31), yet there is no doubt of his physicality since Thomas places his fingers in Jesus’ wounds (20:27); (3) that the implication of “reclining at the table” may indicate that Jesus ate (Lk. 24:30; also John 21:10, 13). We are certainly not on solid ground for postulating the nature of the

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<sup>43</sup> Unlike v. 49 where Paul uses the future *φορεσομεν* to indicate that we will bear the image of Christ, here in v. 48 partaking of the heavenly is open to a both/and understanding. That is, in theological terms the “heavenly” may be seen as both sanctification in the ongoing present and glorification in the future.

somatic body at the resurrection of the dead. It is difficult to determine that which is most associated with his resurrection body and that which is associated with his divinity. Not only this, but Jesus had not yet been fully glorified (John 20:17). The one thing both Paul and the resurrection of Christ demonstrate is continuity with radical change.

Throughout 1 Cor. 15 Paul is little concerned with composition of the resurrected body and more concerned with ethical, moral and spiritual characteristics. As Wright illustrates, “It is the difference between speaking of a ship made of steel or wood on the one hand and a ship driven by steam or wind on the other.”<sup>44</sup> The main emphasis is between a body animated by the soul and driven by soulish desires and one under the complete and total authority of Spiritual power; able to now live out purposeful, meaningful and perfect existence in the kingdom of God. It would not be inappropriate to say that the contrast is between an old car that guzzles gas, burns oil and pollutes the environment and a new futuristic car that runs on endless pure energy with only positive side effects. Our old house was built using faulty blueprints; modeled after the first Adam. Our future house will not be a mere renovation of the one we now possess, but an extreme home makeover, involving demolition and rebuilding according to flawless plans designed by a perfect architect.

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<sup>44</sup> Wright 2003: 352

## HAMARTIOLOGY: IS “SIN” A FOUR LETTER WORD?

(Looking forward to the fall 2015 issue —  
Volume XLI, number 2).

- The focus of the fall issue will be the doctrine of sin. There is not to my knowledge much that Advent Christians have written specifically on the subject, so here’s our chance.
- If you find anything that an Advent Christian has written on hamartiology, feel free to review it, pro, and/or con.
- Letters to the editor will be read, and will probably be printed, unless they simply say — in a lot of words — that you disagree with something someone else said. But, if you take the time to actually interact with something you have read here, I would love to print that!
- Is it ever a sin to tolerate someone else’s sin? How can we be loving to someone who is engaging in sinful activity without pointing out where and why they are wrong? Perhaps you would like to write an article about that.
- Reviews of Advent Christian or conditionalist writings are always welcomed.

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