

BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

MORTALITY AND IMMORTALITY

- Mortality:** Liable to die
The state we experience from the moment of birth to the moment of death
- Immortality:** Deathlessness
The state promised to those accounted worthy to inhabit the Kingdom of God to be established following the return of Christ.

The mortal body—the beginning

The Scriptures record that, “In the beginning . . . the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground” (Gen. 1:1; 2:7). A bodily framework of a man was formed, complete with limbs, sense organs and brain, but it was inanimate, without life. It did not function until “the LORD God . . . breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (2:7). It was at this point that limbs were energized, senses enervated and consciousness activated. It was the breath that gives life that transformed the lifeless structure, and “man became a living soul [Heb. *nephesh*, translated ‘creature’ nine times, as, for example in Genesis 1:21,24]”.

This living creature was new, different from, and of greater mental ability than those previously created. A particular task was given to him: “the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (v. 15); and a special opportunity for the exercise of his unique faculty of free will was placed before him: “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (vv. 16,17).

The decision and disobedience of the man led God to pronounce upon him the consequence: “in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (3:19). In due course “he died” (5:5), which is a statement that confirms his mortality and that of all his descendants, be they Seth, Abraham, Job, David—or even Jesus.

The mortal body—the ending

When Abraham’s life ended, it is recorded that he “gave up the ghost, and died” (25:8). The RSV states that he “breathed his last and died”, which is much closer to the original Hebrew word, which means ‘expire’, ‘breathe out’ (*Strong’s* 1478). Life began when there was a breathing in of the breath that gives life. When that breath is breathed out for the last time, life ceases. A similar phrase is used of, amongst others, Isaac (35:29), Jacob (49:33), Job (Job 10:18)—and Jesus. Mark, for example, records: “Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost” (15:37). Again, the RSV more faithfully presents the meaning of the original Greek word (*ekpneō*, *Strong’s* 1606, meaning ‘to expire’): “Jesus . . . breathed his last”. Without the invigorating breath of life, the bodily structure wastes away.

A further description of death is given, starting with David. It is recorded that “David slept with his fathers” (1 Kgs. 2:10). Similarly, this idea is used of Solomon (11:43), Rehoboam (14:31) and most of the kings, Job (Job 7:21), Lazarus (Jno. 11:11)—and Jesus, for it is said of him that “now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Cor. 15:20).

Sleep as we know it, as an essential ingredient of mortal life, is a period of rest and relaxation, when we are incapable of controlled and purposeful thought, word, action or emotion. In this it is a most apt figure of death, as is seen from these Bible statements: “For

in death there is no remembrance of Thee: in the grave who shall give Thee thanks?" (Ps. 6:5); ". . . when I go down to the pit . . . Shall the dust praise thee? shall it declare Thy truth?" (30:9); "His [the son of man's] breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (146:4); ". . . there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" (Eccl. 9:10). Yet it is a period of inactivity from which we expect to arise.

Immortality

In the same chapter that spoke of Christ being the first to be raised from the sleep of death (1 Cor. 15) in the context of the Kingdom of God (v. 50), it is the mortal body that undergoes a change: "this mortal must put on immortality" (v. 53). This does not speak of some part independent of the body that continues existence forever, but stresses that "we shall all be changed" (v. 51). The idea of a change to a state completely opposite to that experienced now would be unnecessary if immortality were, in some way, already possessed. The Scriptures affirm that "Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father" (Rom. 6:4), and "being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him" (v. 9). It was a consequence of his sinlessness that he was raised from the dead, and it was a consequence of his resurrection that he "brought . . . immortality to light" (2 Tim. 1:10).

It is a principle of God that without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sins (Heb. 9:22). God Himself provided the Lamb whose blood was shed for the sin of the world. It is those "that are Christ's" who are eligible to be "made alive . . . at his coming" (1 Cor. 15:22,23). To the worthy, God will give His gift, which is "eternal life" (Rom. 6:23).

The question of the immortal soul

- Scripture does not directly speak of or teach the doctrine of the immortal soul. Indeed, this term never appears in the Bible.
- It would appear that pagan beliefs held in the kingdoms of Babylon and Egypt, and the teachings of the likes of Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato, became incorporated into Jewish and Christian religion in the years following Christ's death. It is, then, a belief that is man-made and not God-given.
- Any passages of Scripture that appear to support such teaching must be interpreted with this crucial information in mind.
- Thus, when, for example, Stephen as he died said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59), he was speaking, not of an immortal soul, but of that breath without which we die.
- If Adam had possessed an immortal soul, then the pronounced punishment on Adam following his disobedience—"dying thou shalt die"—would have been to no avail, if he or part of him continued in some conscious and active form.
- If we have an immortal soul, life continues whatever happens at death. How can this be reconciled to the Scripture, which says that "our Saviour Jesus Christ . . . hath abolished death, and hath brought life . . . to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10)?

It cannot. We have no immortal soul. When we die the whole of us dies, and those responsible await the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to effect their resurrection, and then, by God's grace, have immortality bestowed upon them.

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