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THE ORIGIN, NATURE, AND DESTINY OF THE SOUL [PART III]

Bert Thompson, Ph.D.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Parts I and II of this series—dealing with the origin and nature of the soul—ran in the February and March issues of *Reason & Revelation*. Effective with this issue, the series continues as it examines the ultimate destiny of the soul.]

It is one thing to suggest that man possesses a soul or spirit. It is another to suggest that he receives such at conception. And it is still another to suggest that the soul/spirit survives the death of the physical body. [Since I previously documented the fact that on occasion within Scripture the words “soul” and “spirit” may be used synonymously, in order to avoid complicating the subject matter unnecessarily from this point on, I will employ them as such, rather than continuing to use the somewhat cumbersome “soul/spirit” designation.] As I mentioned in my introduction to this series, there are a number of different views regarding the immortal nature of the soul.

Among those who accept the existence of the soul, there are some who are quite willing to believe that all men have such a spirit residing within them, but who are quite unwilling to believe that such is immortal, preferring to believe instead that this spiritual part is **purely temporal** (and thus lives only as long as our corporeal nature exists). Conversely, there are some who posit the idea that all humans not only possess an immortal soul, but that the souls of **all people** (regardless of their actions on Earth) will survive the death of the physical body in order to ultimately inhabit the heavenly realm with

God. Others believe that while all men do indeed possess a soul, **only the soul of the faithful child of God** has an immortal nature. That is to say, the souls of those who die outside of Christ are not immortal and perish when the body dies, while the soul of the Christian goes on into eternity. Still others believe that the souls of **both** the faithful child of God **and** the person outside of Christ are immortal—thereby surviving the death of the physical body in order to eventually inhabit either heaven (a place of eternal reward) or hell (a place of eternal punishment). Who is correct? What is the truth of the matter?

“TEMPORAL” SOULS?

Concerning the position that all men possess a soul, but that such is purely temporal and incapable of surviving the physical death of the body, Gilbert Thiele, a professor at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, wrote:

We think it is consequently fair to say, to put it very bluntly, that when a man dies he is dead. The Bible when examined in its length and breadth knows of no disembodied condition in which man lives, temporarily, and certainly not permanently; it knows of neither a temporary nor a permanent human immortality as such (1958, p. 18).

Such a position, however, “to put it very bluntly,” is indefensible in light of the multifarious teachings of Scripture. There are too many passages (e.g., Acts 7:59, Revela-

tion 6:9, Matthew 10:28, et al.—discussed in Parts I & II of this series) which teach that the soul does, in fact, partake of an immortal nature. More will be said on this later.

UNIVERSALISM

The idea that all humans possess an immortal soul, and that each and every one of those souls will survive the death of the physical body in order to inhabit the heavenly realm with God (regardless of their actions on Earth), is known as **universalism**. According to this view, all people will be saved; none will be lost. Advocates of this theory teach that since God is love (1 John 4:8), as well as a Sovereign Who desires mercy rather than sacrifice (Matthew 9:13), then divine punishment must be viewed as merely remedial. God’s loving, longsuffering nature, they suggest, cannot tolerate the loss of even one of His creatures since He is “not willing that any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9).

This view may be somewhat unusual, but it is by no means new. Origen, a well-known, third-century preacher (c. A.D. 185-254) was among the first to espouse it, and he has been joined by a parade of the famous (and not so famous) in the days since. The great poet, Alfred Lord Tennyson, in his poem, *In Memoriam*, advocated universalism. Scottish theologian and University of Glasgow divinity professor, William Barclay, was one of the concept’s most ardent twentieth-century defenders. In his book, *The Plain Man Looks at the Apostles’ Creed*, he wrote:

CONTENTS

ARTICLES

- The Origin, Nature, and Destiny of the Soul [Part III]*
Bert Thompson 33

DEPARTMENTS

- Speaking Schedules 37

Note from the Editor

- Announcing: "An Offer You Can't Refuse!"*
Bert Thompson 40

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It seems to us that if God is the God who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and if the total impression of the Gospel is true, we may dare to hope that when time ends God's family will be complete, for surely we must think in terms, not of a king who is satisfied with a victory which destroys his enemies, but of a Father who can never be content when even a single child of his is outside the circle of his love (1967, p. 239).

When you stop to think about it, it should not be at all surprising that such a view should receive widespread support. After all, it is a most comforting position. In his book, *How Can a God of Love Send People to Hell?*, British author John Benton addressed the inherent appeal of universalism when he wrote:

I am sure that there is a part in all of us which would like to believe that that was true. If not, we are in danger of becoming very hard and unloving people indeed. We sympathize with the emotions which draw some people in the direction of universalism. But, in all honesty, it is impossible to interpret Jesus as teaching universalism (1985, p. 38).

I agree wholeheartedly with both parts of Benton's assessment. First, surely there is a twinge of desire in every human heart that would like to see everyone end up in heaven on the Day of Judgment. What an invigorating and refreshing belief—to entertain the hope that not a single human would lose his or her soul to the netherworld, but instead would walk the golden streets of heaven with God throughout all eternity. Second, however, in all honesty, it is impossible to interpret Jesus as teaching universalism. No amount of wishful thinking on our part can avoid the force of His arguments, or those of His inspired writers, on the subject of the final destination of those who live in rebellion to Heaven's will in the here and now.

Generally speaking, there are two distinct views regarding the mechanics of ultimate, universal salvation. First, there is the idea that entails the "remedial suffering" of which I spoke earlier. Prominent theologian Carl F.H. Henry referred to this notion when he wrote: "Hell itself is transformed from the ultimate state of the lost into a means of grace—a neo-Protestant purgatory of sorts" (1967, p. 27). Second, there is the idea known as "transcendentalism," which one writer expressed as follows:

This idea held that every soul is a part of the "oversoul" of the universe. To use a common metaphor, man is a spark of the universal flame and will eventually return to it to be absorbed into the One Soul of all time.... Hell, according to this nebulous theory, is a training school for fragments of the Eternal Self which must be disciplined into final merger. The soul of man is only a spark of the divine flame and will finally be reabsorbed into it (Woodson, 1973, p. 60).

In both views, "hell" becomes simply a repository of the souls of people who need either: (a) a "second chance"—a fact brought to their attention by a little temporary "remedial suffering"; or (b) a brief period of disciplining/chastising to help them "shape up before they ship out" to the eternal joys of heaven. Such fanciful theories, of course, are not found within Scripture. Rather, they represent little more than wishful thinking on the part of those who, like universalists, hope to avoid the eternity of Hell that is associated in the Bible with God's divine mode, and term, of punishment. Anyone who suggests that repentance, reparation, and redemption are possible **after death** (as both of these ideas plainly teach) simply does not understand the bulk of the Bible's teaching on such matters. The writer of the book of Hebrews wrote: "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment" (9:27). The Lord Himself explained in Matthew 25:31-46 exactly what would happen to the wicked (whom He termed "goats," as opposed to the righteous, whom He labeled "sheep") on that great Judgment Day: "And these shall go away into **eternal punishment**, but the righteous into **eternal life**" (v. 46). Not much comfort for the universalist in these passages, is there?

In order to bolster their belief system, on occasion universalists have appealed to passages of Scripture that refer to God's concern for "all" men, or which show that the gift of life has been given to "all" people. Numerous statements from Paul, for example, have been quoted in potential support of universalism, including: (a) Romans 5:18 ("through one act of righteousness the free gift came unto **all** men to justification of life"); (b) Romans 11:25-26 ("**all** Israel shall be saved"); (c) 1 Corinthians 15:22 ("in Christ **all** shall be made alive"); and (d) 2 Corin-

thians 5:14 (“the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all”). In his book, *Eternal Hope*, liberal theologian Emil Brunner wrote:

That is the revealed will of God and the plan for the world which He discloses—a plan of **universal salvation**, of gathering all things into Christ. We hear not one word in the Bible of a dual plan, a plan of salvation and its polar opposite. The will of God has but one point, it is unambiguous and positive. It has one aim, not two (1954, p. 182, emp. added).

John A.T. Robinson, a bishop in the Church of England, wrote in a similar vein:

In a universe of love there can be no heaven which tolerates a chamber of horrors, no hell for any which does not at the same time make it hell for God. He cannot endure that—for that would be the final mockery of His nature—and He will not (1949, p. 155).

Brunner and Robinson, however, are dead wrong. It is clear—when the passages from Paul’s inspired pen are examined in their appropriate context—that they are not teaching the false concept of universalism. While the apostle taught that the Gospel of Christ is **universally available**, he did not teach that the Gospel would be **universally accepted**! In fact, he taught quite the opposite. In 2 Thessalonians 1:8, Paul referred to the fact that one day the Lord would return “from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that **obey not the gospel** of our Lord Jesus.” Interestingly, in the very next verse he wrote that such people “shall suffer punishment, **even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord** and from the glory of his might.” Not much support here for universalism either, is there?

Universalism is an erroneous view that must be rejected, not only because it contradicts plain Bible teaching on the eternal fate of the wicked, but also because it makes a mockery of Christ’s commission to His followers (whether in His day or in ours) as presented in Matthew 28:19-20. His command was: “Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you.” But, as Benton has pointed out:

If everyone is saved, then Jesus’ commission to his followers to preach the gospel and make disciples is pointless. People are going to be saved anyway. Universalism suffers from fatal defects. It is an alluring theory, but it does not fit the New Testament. Christianity is founded on the teachings of Christ and if we want to know what Christianity stands for, we must be prepared to face squarely what Jesus taught (1985, p. 38).

Indeed we must! But suggesting that all men everywhere will be saved—regardless of the lives they lead or the obedience to God’s Word that they do or do not render—is tantamount to saying that Christ erred when He said that at His Second Coming He will “render unto every man **according to his deeds**” (Matthew 16:27, emp. added). If universalism is true, He likewise was mistaken when He taught that “every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words **thou shalt be condemned**” (Matthew 12:36-37, emp. added). Similarly, Paul was wrong when he reminded first-century Christians: “So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12).

True, universalism is an “alluring theory”—no doubt due in large part to the fact that it stresses only the goodness of God and none of His other equally important traits. Paul, however, “shrank not from declaring the **whole counsel** of God” (Acts 20:27, emp. added). Rather, he proclaimed: “Behold then the goodness and severity of God: toward them that fell, severity; but toward thee, God’s goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off” (Romans 11:22). As David Brown observed:

One of the great obligations of the church in getting lost men to see the error of their ways and obey the gospel is to preach the truth of the Bible regarding Hell and who is going there. To preach only the goodness of God is to omit part of the whole counsel of God (1999, p. 166).

And from the beginning of the Old Testament (e.g., Deuteronomy 4:2) to the end of the New (e.g., Revelation 22:18), the injunctions against altering, adding to, or deleting from God’s Word are serious indeed. Universalism—as a doctrine that alters, adds to, and deletes from God’s Word—should be (in fact, must be!) rejected.

ANNIHILATION FOR THE WICKED/ ETERNITY IN HEAVEN FOR THE RIGHTEOUS?

It hardly should surprise or shock us that atheists, agnostics, and infidels of every stripe have long rejected the notion (associated with the concept of an immortal soul) of an unending penalty for wickedness. First, they reject the idea of the existence of the soul itself and, second, they find the idea of eternal punishment utterly abhorrent. As Brown noted: “One should not think it strange when men imagine doctrines that release them from the eternal consequences of a sinful life. What doctrine of the Bible has escaped corruption in the fertile imagination of rebellious men?” (1999, p. 161). Prominent British atheistic philosopher Antony Flew stated:

I must confess that this subject of the doctrine of hell is one about which I find it very difficult to maintain my supposed national British calm and reserve. But let me, with what restraint I can muster, say that if anything can be known to be monstrously, inordinately wrong and unjust, it is the conduct of which this God is said to assume. If anything can be known to be just quite monstrously, inordinately, unquestionably unjust and evil, it is the conduct of a Being creating conscious creatures, whether human or animal, in the full knowledge, and with the intention, that these creatures should be maintained by His sustaining power eternally in infinite and unlimited torment. I speak of this with what little restraint I can muster because, if anything seems clear to me about good and evil, just and unjust, it is clear to me that this is monstrous (1977, pp. 84-85).

The famous nineteenth-century American agnostic, Robert G. Ingersoll (1833-1899), wrote:

This idea of hell was born of ignorance, brutality, fear, cowardice, and revenge. This idea testifies that our remote ancestors were the lowest beasts. Only from the dens, lairs, and caves, only from the mouths filled with cruel fangs, only from hearts of fear and hatred, only from the conscience of hunger and lust, only from the lowest and most debased could come this cruel, heartless, and bestial of all dogmas... (as quoted in Lewis, 1983, p. 90).

Ingersoll then went on to say:

The idea of hell is born of revenge and brutality. I have no respect for any human being who believes in it. I have no respect for any man who preaches it. I dislike this doctrine. I hate it, despise, and defy it. The doctrine of hell is infamous beyond words (as quoted in Stacey, 1977, p. 59).

In his widely circulated essay, *Why I Am Not a Christian*, English agnostic philosopher Bertrand Russell commented: “I must say that I think all this doctrine, that hell-fire is a punishment for sin, is a doctrine of cruelty. It is a doctrine that put cruelty into the world and gave the world generations of cruel torture...” (1967, p. 18).

But what about those who believe in God and who accept as genuine the existence of the soul? Some among that number believe that while all men do indeed possess a soul, **only that of the faithful child of God has an immortal nature**. That is to say, the souls of those who die outside of Christ are not immortal and thus perish when the body dies, while the soul of the Christian goes into eternity (i.e., heaven). Others believe that the souls of **both** the faithful child of God **and** the person outside of Christ are immortal—thereby surviving the death of the physical body in order to eventually inhabit either a place of eternal reward (heaven) or a place of eternal punishment (hell). Which position is correct?

To be sure, there have been those who have taught that **only** the souls of the faithful are immortal, while those of the unfaithful perish at their physical death (a concept known as annihilationism). And again, this is not a new doctrine. In the July 1852 issue of *Christian Magazine*, a popular preacher from Nashville, Tennessee by the name of Jesse B. Ferguson asked:

Is Hell a dungeon dug by Almighty hands before man was born, into which the wicked are to be plunged? And is the salvation upon the preacher’s lips a salvation from such a Hell? For ourselves, we rejoice to say it, we never believed, and upon the evidence so far offered, never can believe it (1852, p. 202).

In an article titled “Fire, Then Nothing” written in *Christianity Today* 135 years later, denominational scholar Clark Pinnock suggested that the souls of the wicked are annihilated at physical death (1987). In his book,

The Fire That Consumes, Edward W. Fudge taught the same concept when he wrote: “The wicked, following whatever degree and duration of pain that God may justly inflict, will finally and truly die, perish and **become extinct for ever and ever**” (1982, p. 425, emp. added). Interestingly, Fudge’s book drew rave reviews from certain quarters.

John N. Clayton, a self-proclaimed former-atheist-turned-Christian who lectures frequently on Christian evidences, and who is known chiefly for his numerous compromises of the Genesis account of creation, edits a small, bi-monthly journal titled *Does God Exist?* In the September/October 1990 issue, he reviewed *The Fire That Consumes* and said:

One of the most frequent challenges of atheists during our lectures is the question of the reasonableness of the concept of hell. Why would a loving, caring, merciful God create man as he is, **knowing** that man would sin, reject God, and be condemned to eternal punishment? I have had to plead ignorance in this area because I had no logical answer that was consistent with the Bible.... I have never been able to be comfortable with the position that a person who rejected God should suffer forever and ever and ever (1990a, p. 20, emp. in orig.).

Clayton first described Fudge’s book as “an exhaustive, scholarly study of the subject of hell,” then confidently affirmed that it “will open many new viewpoints to any thinking reader,” and finally concluded by saying: “**I recommend this book highly** to the serious student of the Bible who is not afraid to have some traditions challenged” (pp. 20-21, emp. added). Strangely, in the 1990 edition of his book, *The Source*, Clayton recommended Fudge’s volume as one that contained “reasonably accurate **scientific** material”—even though the book deals solely with **theological** matters (1990b, pp. 190-191). At his weekend seminars on Christian evidences, Mr. Clayton routinely makes available a handout in which he recommends certain books that he believes would be of benefit to each of the seminar participants. Fudge’s book is included on that handout. And, in the 1991 edition of the *Teacher’s Guide* that accompanies his *Does God Exist? Christian Evidences Intermediate Course*, Clayton offered the following suggestion in regard to lesson number six:

One approach that is very useful, although somewhat controversial, is Edward Fudge’s book *The Fire That Consumes*. Fudge deals with the subject of this lesson and takes the position that hell is the destruction of the soul (1991, p. 25, emp. added).

In April 1988, while speaking on the subject of “A Christian Response to the New Age Movement” at the annual Pepperdine University lectures in Malibu, California, best-selling author F. LaGard Smith asked the members of his audience:

I also wonder if you feel as uncomfortable as I do in our traditional view of hell. Do you readily accept the traditional view of hell that says God sort of dangles you over the fires that burn day and night?... Is that what hell is all about? Haven’t you struggled with the idea of how there can be a loving God and anywhere in his presence permit that to exist? Doesn’t it seem like cruel and unusual punishment? (1988).

In that same lecture, Smith strenuously argued that God will “destroy it [the soul—BT]. Not punish it. Not dangle it. Not torture it. **Destroy it!**” (1988). Three years later, in October 1991, Wayne Jackson (as editor of the *Christian Courier*) wrote LaGard Smith to ask him about his position on the destiny of the souls of the wicked. Within a week, Smith replied via a five-page, handwritten letter in which he admitted that he believed in “the possibility that part of the ultimate punishment of the wicked is total destruction of their souls” (as quoted in Jackson, 1993, p. 65; see Jackson, 1998, 33[9]:35 for a discussion of, and response to, Smith’s subsequent claim that he has been “misunderstood” in regard to his views on the annihilation of the soul).

Another advocate of the view that the souls of the wicked will be annihilated is Alan Pickering who, in the 1980s, presented seminars around the country under the title of “Sharpening the Sword.” In December 1986, he spoke at the Central Church of Christ in Stockton, California and advocated the view that the souls of the wicked, after a limited period of punishment, will cease to exist. As he had done with LaGard Smith, Wayne Jackson (who lives in Stockton) wrote Pickering to inquire if the material available on audio tape from his lectures did, in fact, accurately represent his views. In a subsequent telephone conversation a few days later, Mr. Pickering acknowledged that it did, and even

went so far as to state that the concept of eternal conscious punishment for the wicked was a “slap in the face of God.” He then challenged Wayne to a public debate on the matter—a challenge he later retracted when his offer was accepted (see Jackson, 1987, 23[8]:31).

In addition to those mentioned above, well-known creationist Robert L. Whitelaw defended the annihilationist position in his work, *Can There be Eternal Life Apart from Christ?*, when he wrote of those who die outside of Christ:

Yet nowhere among all the pillars of theological orthodoxy...do we find a work of solid exegesis proving the notion of man’s innate immortality to be the teaching of the Bible, based on the whole counsel of Scripture.... Search Scripture as you will, there is no hint of any other kind of life or existence beyond Judgment Day for any being, human or demonic.... We have shown that nowhere in Scripture does God describe the state of lost mankind after Judgment Day as “life,” “living,” or even unconscious existence (1991, pp. 2,11).

The list of prominent religionists who have supported, and continue to support, the annihilationist position could be extended with ease. What, then, should be our response to this curious dogma?

At the outset, we should acknowledge clear biblical instruction that the soul of the faithful child of God will enjoy eternity forever in heaven. Such a concept is established beyond doubt in both the Old and New Testaments. As early as the book of Genesis, we read that Abraham “was gathered to his

people” (25:8). Obviously, this cannot mean that Abraham was buried with his ancestors since “his people” were buried in Ur of the Chaldees and in Haran. Abraham, on the other hand, was buried in the cave of Machpelah (25:9). The same words were used of Aaron (Numbers 20:24,26) and Moses (Numbers 27:13; 31:2; Deuteronomy 32:50). Certainly, in their individual cases this cannot possibly have reference to their interment in some sort of family tomb or burial plot. Gesenius, in his *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, noted that “this being gathered to one’s people, or fathers, is expressly distinguished both from death and from burial” (1979, p. 67).

When David’s son (born as a result of his adultery with Bathsheba) died shortly after birth, the shattered sovereign said:

While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, “Who knoweth whether Jehovah will not be gracious to me, that the child may live?” But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? **I shall go to him**, but he will not return to me (2 Samuel 12:22-23, emp. added).

Amidst his much suffering, the patriarch Job said:

But as for me I know that my Redeemer liveth, and at last he will stand upon the earth: And after my skin, even this body, is destroyed, **then without my flesh shall I see God**; Whom I, even I, shall see, on my side, and mine eyes shall behold, and not as a stranger (Job 19:25-27, emp. added).

When Elijah raised the widow’s son from the dead (1 Kings 17:21-22), Scripture states:

And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto Jehovah, and said, “O Jehovah my God, I pray thee, let this child’s soul come into him again.” And Jehovah hearkened unto the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.

Because of the fact that we have access to later revelation, such as that contained in James 2:26 which states that “the body apart from the spirit is dead,” we understand that in 1 Kings 17 the word soul (*nepesh*) is employed to speak of the immortal nature of the young man (i.e., his soul/spirit). His body was dead due to the fact that his spirit had departed. Elijah prayed that it be returned, and it was, which certainly precludes its annihilation. In His discussion with Martha concerning life after death, Jesus said: “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and **whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die**” (John 11:25-27, emp. added; cf. Revelation 6:9).

On one occasion while he was serving as king of Israel, the Philistines were amassing for war, “and when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. And when Saul inquired of Jehovah, Jehovah answered him not” (1 Samuel 28:5). Saul, therefore—in violation of both God’s law (Deuteronomy 18:10) and Israelite law (1 Samuel 28:9)—sought out a “medium” whom he hoped could “conjure up” Samuel’s long-departed spirit (1 Samuel 28:3 records that “Samuel was dead, and all Israel had lamented him, and buried him in Ramai”), from whom he intended to seek counsel and comfort. The medium (known as “the witch of Endor”) somehow contacted Samuel, and expressed her fear at the sight of his disembodied spirit (1 Samuel 28:12). Samuel’s response documents the fact that he did not relish a call back to this world: “Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?” (28:15). If his immortal nature had been annihilated at his death, how, then, was he able to return (and even to complain about having to do so!)? Remember also that the spirits of Moses and Elijah not only joined Christ on a mountaintop in Palestine, but spoke to Him as well (Luke 9:30-31). If those spirits had ceased to exist at their owners’ demise, how could they have done either?



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That death is **not** total annihilation is clear from the words of Christ in John 5: 28-29: “The hour cometh in which **all** that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and **shall come forth.**” In Luke 8:55, the account is recorded of Christ raising Jairus’ daughter from the dead. The text reads as follows: “And her spirit (*pneuma*) returned, and she rose up immediately.” If her spirit had been annihilated, it hardly could have “returned.” And, at the risk of repeating myself, I would like to point out that Christ’s discussion with the Sadducees (as recorded in Matthew 22) must not be overlooked in this context. On that occasion, the Lord quoted from Exodus 3: 6 where God had said to Moses: “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Yet as Christ went on to state (and as the Sadducees accepted as true), “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (22:32). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been dead and in their graves for many years. Since we know from Christ’s own words (and the inability of the Sadducees to offer any rebuttal whatsoever) that “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living,” the point is obvious. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob still must have been living. How so? The answer, of course, lies in the fact that while their bodies had died, their souls had not. And since their immortal nature lived on, it could not have been annihilated at their physical demise.

On one occasion during Jesus’ earthly ministry, He discussed the importance of the soul with His disciples when He said: “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36-37). Indeed, if the immortal nature of man is annihilated at the death of the body, what was Christ’s point? Would not a man benefit by exchanging “annihilation” for the “whole world”?

What did Christ mean, then, when He warned: “Be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28)? As D.M. Lake observed, at the very least this “does imply a transcendental reality that is in some cases independent of the body. This seems to be the force of Jesus’ statement [in] Matthew 10:28” (1976, 5:497). The “destruction” of which Jesus spoke was described by the apostle John as the “second death.”

The devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night **for ever and ever....** And they were judged every man according to their works. And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, even the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10-14, emp. added).

The eternal nature of that second death is evident from John’s description of the wicked men who “shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God...and shall be tormented with fire and brimstone...and **the smoke of their torment goeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day and night**” (Revelation 14:10-11, emp. added).

Furthermore, the position that **only** the souls of the faithful are immortal, while those of “lost mankind” are annihilated at their physical death, is both terribly wrong and squarely at odds with the teachings of God’s Word. The Scriptures plainly indicate that the disobedient are to be subjected to eternal punishment. In Matthew 25:46, Jesus said that the wicked would “go away into **eternal** punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” In his second epistle to the Christians at Thessalonica, Paul wrote specifically of “them that know not God” and “obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” as those “who shall suffer punishment, even **eternal** destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (1:8-9). In addressing this point, Wayne Jackson wrote:

There is, however, no punishment, or suffering, apart of consciousness. And yet, consciousness (knowledge, awareness) is a characteristic of the spirit (1 Cor. 2:11). One must necessarily infer, therefore, that the spirit (our soul) of man will exist in an eternal conscious state. Jesus once said regarding the traitor Judas that it would have been better for that man had he never been born (Mark 14:21). If Judas did not exist before his earthly life, and yet was to be annihilated eventually, how does the Lord’s statement make sense? How is non-existence better than non-existence? (1991, 27[5]:19).

Additionally, the New Testament account (recorded in Luke 16) that describes Christ’s discussion of two men who died under different circumstances merits serious consideration here. One, Lazarus, went to Abraham’s bosom (a synonym for paradise). The other, an unnamed rich man, found himself in the

portion of hades where, he exclaimed, “I am tormented in this flame” (16:22-24). Thus, the spirits of the two men, upon leaving their bodies, were alive, conscious, and even able to converse—although they were in two significantly different places. One was “comforted,” one was “tormented,” and a great gulf separated them (Luke 16:26). When the rich man requested that Lazarus be allowed to return to Earth to warn his five brothers not to follow him to such a terrible place, Abraham denied his request and responded: “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded **if one rise from the dead**” (16:31). The key phrase here, of course, is “**if one rise from the dead.**” Abraham did not say that such was **impossible**; rather, he indicated that it was **inappropriate**. There is a vast difference in the two. Lazarus **could** have returned, but was not allowed to do so. The simple fact of the matter is that Abraham’s spirit, Lazarus’ spirit, and the rich man’s spirit all continued to exist beyond the grave. That the rich man found himself in a place (and state) of torment demolishes the idea that the souls of the wicked do not survive this life. That the souls of the wicked endure torment “for ever and ever, and have no rest day and night” (Revelation 14:10-11) demolishes the idea that the souls of the wicked are annihilated at any point following the death of the physical body.

Some, of course, have lamented that since the account in Luke 16 is “only” a parable, neither its message nor its implications may be taken literally. Such a notion, however, overlooks several important points regarding the nature of the text itself. First, notice that Christ referred to two of the three people **by name**. He mentioned both Abraham and Lazarus. As Tim Rice has observed:

Those of the “parable” philosophy who disparage of an eternal hell’s existence think that the rich man was a fictional character. They even ignore the fact that Lazarus’ name is the **only proper name ever used in a parable** (if this be a parable). The key to the question of whether this account is strictly imagery is not just the consideration of the rich man or Lazarus, but Abraham! In Matthew 22:32, Jesus Himself claimed that Abraham continued to live in the spiritual realm. The narrative of the rich man and Lazarus places Lazarus in the presence of a literal Old Testament figure, Abraham, who was existing in some realm at that time (1987, 15[1]:6, parenthetical comment in orig, emp. added).

Second, what, exactly, was Christ's point in relating this account? Was He attempting to deceive his hearers? Was He merely trying to "scare" them into submission to Heaven's will? Rice has inquired:

If the covetous do not really enter a realm where they can think, remember, and where they desire relief and are bound from salvation by a great gulf, why would Jesus con his hearers by discussing such a realm? The thrust of his narrative was to make his hearers avoid the position in which the rich man found himself, i.e., torment (1987, 15[1]:6).

Third, compare the condition of the rich man (as depicted by Christ) with a similar passage also from the lips of the Lord. That covetous fellow described his horrible fate when he remarked: "I am tormented in this **flame**" (Luke 16:24, emp. added). In Matthew 25:41, the Lord said to those who were doomed: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal **fire** which is prepared for the devil and his angels." Acknowledging what Christ taught in Matthew 25, upon what basis could we draw the conclusion that He was teaching anything different in Luke 16? Was He not attempting to warn His hearers in both instances of a **literal** place where they (**literally!**) did not want to go?

Fourth, Jesus was not in the habit of using the "abstract" in His parables. Rather, He used substantive examples of events that were based on the everyday lives of His audience. When He presented for His audience's consideration the parables of the sower (Matthew 13:3-23), the tares (Matthew 13:24-30), or the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10), He was speaking about things that literally could have happened. Similarly, the things He discussed in the account of the rich man and Lazarus could have happened, since additional passages (e.g., Matthew 25, Jude 7, et al.) confirm the existence of a spirit realm such as the one described by the Lord in Luke 16. As Rice has noted: "Even if this account **were** a parable, the realm described is real" (1987, 15[1]:6, emp. in orig.). David Brown reasoned in a comparable fashion.

If, for the sake of argument, we admit that Luke 16:19-31 is a parable, annihilationists can get no solace from such an admission. Why is this the case? It is because all parables teach the truth. Now, what is the truth taught in the case of the "Rich man and Lazarus"? At death wicked men go into torment,

and saved men into a place of comfort and rest. However, we do not admit that the passage is a parable. It bears no marks of a parable. Quite the contrary when the passage is analyzed. Please note that Jesus emphatically declared in no uncertain terms, "There was a certain rich man...." Question: Was there? Jesus answers, "There was...." Our Lord declared in no uncertain terms, "...there was a certain beggar named Lazarus...." Question: Was there? Jesus answers, "There was...." These two men lived on earth, died, and according to their conduct on earth, went to their respective places in the hades world to await the end of the world, the resurrection, and the Judgment. Our Lord selected them to teach us a lesson regarding what transpired at death for the wicked and the blest (1999, pp. 170-171).

Furthermore, there are several other important points that practically leap off the pages of Scripture, and that need to be examined in this particular context. First, those who argue for the ultimate annihilation of the souls of the wicked apparently have failed to comprehend both the abominable, repulsive nature of man's sin against God and the inestimable, unspeakable price Heaven paid to redeem rebellious man from its clutches. Second, they seem not to have grasped the necessity or purpose of punishment in God's grand plan. Third, they evidently have overlooked (or ignored) the straightforward teaching of the Scriptures on the eternal fate of the wicked. And fourth, they appear to have missed the telling fact that every single argument made against the existence of an eternal Hell likewise can be leveled against the existence of an eternal heaven. Each of these deserves close scrutiny.

[to be continued]

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

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