

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.***

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

#05-1111

When is Immortality Put On?

January 11, 2011

(1) For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2) For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven (3) inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. (4) For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. (5) Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. (2 Corinthians 5:1-5 NASB)

These verses are most often quoted by those who hold that believers go to heaven immediately *in* death, and, it should be added, unbelievers go to hell immediately. According to them, Paul wanted to put off his earthly, physical body so he could go to heaven and be with the Lord where he would receive a spiritual body. To be sure, Paul desired to be with the Lord, as we all should desire, but this does not mean that Paul taught that at death a believer immediately goes to heaven. If this were so, which it is not, then all that Paul taught on the resurrection would be meaningless.

Paul made *no such assertion* and placed *no immediacy* between being in the earthly body and receiving the dwelling from heaven, which Paul called the spiritual body.

As surely as there are physical [soulish] bodies, there are spiritual bodies. And our physical bodies will be changed into spiritual bodies. (1 Corinthians 15:44 CEV [CV])

We need to be clear that Paul used the phrase "dwelling from heaven" to identify the source of the dwelling. It is heavenly because it comes from God, and it is spiritual because God is spirit, and God's seed is planted within all who believe (1 John 3:9). However, this does not mean that the spiritual body will be restricted to heaven, for the saints shall **reign upon the earth** (Revelation 5:10). The spiritual body will be like Jesus' body after He was resurrected and revealed Himself to His disciples.

Again, the only way to receive a spiritual body is through resurrection and transfiguration. In fact, the above opening verses must be interpreted in light of Paul's defense of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. The two cannot and must not be separated. Paul was simply expressing what should be the desire of every believer, that is, immortality that comes through resurrection and transfiguration. We must put off corruption and put on incorruption, and we must put off mortality and put on immortality. The earnest (pledge) of the spirit within us groans for the spiritual body. Are you groaning?

It is vital to understand that Paul referred to the dead as being asleep: **God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus** (i.e., **the dead in Christ**) (1 Thessalonians 4:14, 16). Jesus made the same connection between death and sleep: **"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep. Lazarus is dead"** (John 11:11, 14). But going back further, the oldest book of the Bible makes the same assertion: **So man lies down and does not rise. Until the heavens are no longer, he will not awake nor be aroused out of his sleep** (Job 14:12). Asaph declared: **Both rider and horse were cast into a dead sleep** (Psalm 76:6). David wrote: **As for me, I shall behold Your face in righteousness; I will be satisfied with Your likeness when I awake** (Psalm 17:15). According to Peter, **the patriarch David both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day, for it was not David who ascended into heaven** (Acts 2:29, 34). **Sleep signifies a state of unconsciousness.** Solomon wrote that **the dead do not know anything** (Ecclesiastes 9:5). It is safe to state that the ancient Hebrews held this view of death. Again, Job asked: **"If a man dies, will he live again? All the days of my struggle I will wait until my change comes** (Job 14:14 NASB), which only comes through resurrection and transfiguration. According to the testimony of scripture, there is no other way out of the sleep of death, which is an unconscious state.

Again, death is merely a sleep time for all mankind. It is a state of unconsciousness. One day, all will be awakened from their sleep to rise up and meet the Lord, whether at the first or second resurrection. The period of sleep will seem like a night, even though it might be a very long time, as in hundreds or thousands of years. The next moment of consciousness for all the dead will be in the presence of the Lord, even if it is to face the Great White Throne through the second resurrection.

Some people believe that resurrection occurs at the death of the believer. However, this clearly ignores or distorts the fact that the two resurrections are described as major, distinct events at specific points in time (John 5:28-29; 11:24; 1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 4.13-18; Revelation 20:4-6; 11-15). Our expectation is to rise in the first resurrection if we die before the Lord comes. We eagerly wait for our Savior to come from heaven.

There can be no inconsistencies in Paul's writings. The heavenly body comes into view only at the resurrection and snatching away of believers. To the Philippians, he wrote: **For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself** (Philippians 3:20-21 NASB).

Again, 2 Corinthians 5 must be interpreted in light of 1 Corinthians 15.

Because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. (2 Corinthians 5:4 NASB)

(53) For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. (54) But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. (1 Corinthians 15:53-54 NASB)

Mortality or death is swallowed up in immortality. According to Paul's evangel, there is no other way!

It is unfortunate, but many Christians believe in the immortality of the soul, and, on this basis, they have fallen into the error of the soul going to heaven upon death. However, this belief comes from Greek philosophers, not scripture, and has long been embraced by pagan religions. The soul is connected to the body and its blood, **for the soul of the flesh is in the blood** (Leviticus 17:11 DNT). When the spirit of life was breathed into Adam, he became a *living soul*. Soul is not given by God; it comes about when life comes into the body. When the body dies, so does the soul, for the soul is the animation (sensations) or consciousness of the body. Pour out the blood of the body, and the body and soul die. Thus, the soul is nothing apart from the body.

Consider this: If the soul were immortal and went to heaven on death, one would go to heaven unclothed because the heavenly clothing, which is spirit, not soul, only comes at the resurrection and transfiguration. This means that the believer would be naked before God, for the soul does not exist apart from the body, which is the way that mankind is constituted.

Some work around this difficulty by teaching that the soul is clothed with some intermediary covering. Their reasoning is based on *the parable* (not a literal story) of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16.19-31). However, this is based on a faulty understanding of this parable. See issue #04-1035, April 5, 2010, *Rich Man and Lazarus*. The pagans believed in the immortality of the soul and, sadly, so do many believers.

Finally, some might argue that it is the spirit that is immortal, not the soul. In speaking of death, Solomon wrote: **Then the dust** [i.e., physical body] **will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it** (Ecclesiastes 12:7 NASB). Ask yourself this question: Do you have any recollection of the spirit prior to your birth? I surely don't! Scripture gives us no reason to believe our spirit retains consciousness in death either. It simply returns to God who gave it in the first place. I suspect, but cannot prove it, that our memory and identity is somehow retained in the spirit just as a computer retains memory after it is shut off; data is retained even with the power turned off. Let us keep in mind that we must be transfigured into a **spiritual body**, not simply some spirit being. As Paul wrote, we are **waiting eagerly for the redemption of our body** (Romans 8:23).