

# 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)

#05-1119

## ***Is the Soul Immortal?***

January 19, 2011

The last issue briefly explained the source of the soul and what it means.

First, it comes forth when the breath of the spirit of life is breathed into an inanimate body. When the spirit enters the body, it becomes animated as a living soul.

Second, if the soul only comes into being when the body and spirit are joined, then it only follows that the soul does not exist prior to the body becoming a living soul. It only becomes soul when the breath of the spirit of life enters the body. This is an important point, for it proves that the soul is not immortal, at least on the front end or before life comes into the body. In other words, it does not exist in some mystical state that we have no conscious awareness of prior to our birth. Another way of stating this is that it is not eternal.

Third, the soul or, simply, soul is the animation of the body and its relationship and interaction with the environment in which it lives and partakes. It is not life per se but the human experience of living in a body that sees, touches, tastes, smells, etc. We could define soul as the experience of life in a body as experienced through the sensations and feelings of seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling. As such, soul could be likened to a phenomenon and a capacity.

Fourth, **the soul** [nephesh] **of the flesh is in the blood** (Leviticus 17:11 DNT), which means that soul is intimately joined to the blood of the body. Take away the blood, and what happens to the soul? Herein lies the answer to the question of whether the soul is immortal or not.

If the blood is drained out of a body, what happens to the body and the blood? Obviously, the body dies and returns to the soil, and so does the blood, except the blood dries up and is absorbed back into the soil much faster than the bones of the body.

Pour out (drain) the blood, and both the blood and the body die, meaning the living soul dies. So, if the soul of the flesh, that is, of the body, is in the blood, and death ensues when the blood is poured out, then logic dictates that the soul dies too. Death brings an end to the experiences of the body. They are no more. As Solomon wrote: **For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything** (Ecclesiastes 9:5 NASB). If the dead know nothing, then surely their experiences are gone as well.

As I have written many times, death is death, which is a cessation of life; it is not life in what some call afterlife or life in heaven or in death or, for that matter, even in what people call *hell*. You cannot have life in death; it is an oxymoronic statement that requires that death be redefined to include life.

The fact of the matter is that there is no scriptural evidence that the soul departs the body and goes to heaven or into some afterlife *in* death. In other words, there is no evidence that the phenomenon called soul is immortal, for immortality means that one comes into a life that is beyond the reach of death, never to experience it again.

It is safe to state that believing in the immortality of the soul has led to the popular but erroneous belief that when people die, they go to either heaven or hell. However, this concept comes from pagan religion, not scripture, and it can be traced back to ancient Egypt and Babylon and, later, the Greeks.

At the time of Jesus' first advent, the Jews came in contact with Greek philosophy that believed in the immortality of the soul, and this thinking began to infiltrate into Jewish teaching.

It is reported that this error came to them primarily through the philosophy of Plato (428-348 BC) and his student Socrates. Evidently, Plato's thinking was a strange blend of ancient Babylonian and Egyptian thinking. Plato and Socrates taught that the soul was immortal and, at the time of death, the body and soul separate.

Unfortunately, Christians were corrupted by Greek philosophy early on as well. By 200 AD, the belief in the immortality of the soul had become a controversy amongst Christians. Obviously, some knew the truth and were not to be persuaded by error.

Where is the controversy today? There are others who stand against such error and try to offer the truth; however, based on what is heard coming out of large factions of the church, we would have to conclude that there is not much controversy. What I mean is that so many Christians seem to accept the error of dying and going to heaven or hell, based on the immortality of the soul, that there is really not much controversy. Add to this the many movies that portray life in death and souls being tormented in their afterlife as if it all were real, and it is no wonder that there is no controversy today.

I realize there is some scripture that people use to support the error of soul immortality. Some even use Jesus' words to prove their point. Case in point is the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. It seems to me that Jesus often exhorted the religious elite by using things they believed even if they were error. In other words, He did not always correct them but, instead, sort of threw their error right back at them.

For example, when the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebub, Jesus did not correct them by telling them that the Baal-god, which was known as the god of flies or of dung, was a false god to be ignored. Instead, Jesus asked: **"If I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges** (Matthew 12:27). I realize that it is generally taught that Beelzebub is Satan, but Jesus was using the word as a parody, which treats a serious subject in a nonsensical manner, as in ridicule. *Beelzebub* is of Chaldean origin and referred to baal-zebul, which was a special deity of the Ekronites. Notice how Jesus hit them head-on using their own terminology. We could say that He threw dung at them.

We must be careful not to make every word of Jesus' into some deep theological or universal, doctrinal truth. Unfortunately, a lot of this has been done to support doctrines involving heaven, hell, and the immortality of the soul. See #03-0955, April 22, 2009, *Gates of Hades*; #04-1035, April 5, 2010, *Rich Man and Lazarus*; #04-1037, April 8, 2010, *Gehenna, Not Hell*; #04-1038, April 9, 2010, *Gehenna, Divine Judgment*; #04-1039, April 10, 2010, *Lake of Fire*.

Now, there is one verse that some use to support the immortality of the soul and that others use to support the total annihilation of unbelievers in the lake of fire. I reject both views.

**'And be not afraid of those killing the body, and are not able to kill the soul, but fear rather Him who is able both soul and body to destroy in gehenna.'** (Matthew 10:28 YLT)

Frankly, I have struggled over this verse for a number of years until just a few weeks ago, when I realized that Jesus was simply challenging the Greek teaching on the immortality of the soul without directly propounding a doctrine that refuted it. He knew what was taught in that day and what some of the Jews, even His disciples, erroneously believed. They knew the body died but believed the soul went on to some afterlife in death. Jesus cut right to the heart of the matter that the soul and body die.

Actually, the message He conveyed was about fearing God who would judge the Jews in the gehenna of fire, which is divine judgment unto death. We could call it God's capital punishment. Those who are judged in this manner die and their dead bodies are not given a proper burial but are thrown into a fiery garbage dump that burns the refuse. The soul is also there because it too dies with the body. The dead do not know anything. Likewise, in the gehenna of fire, the dead (body and soul) do not know anything either. They have no knowledge because death is the cessation of life; take the body away, and the soul ceases to exist, for it is the experience of the body.

Conclusion: **The soul is not immortal at the point of death or *in* death.**