

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)

#05-1122

Souls Under the Altar

January 22, 2011

I thought I was done writing about the soul in order to refute the doctrine of the immortality of the soul; however, I realized that there is one more set of verses that are often used to support this erroneous doctrine. According to this pagan doctrine, the soul does not die when the body dies but goes on to another realm of life.

(9) When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; (10) and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (11) And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also. (Revelation 6:9-11 NASB)

What does "the souls under the altar" mean? Are they alive, which would indicate that the soul is immortal? Or, do these souls signify something spiritual or figurative?

I must confess that at one time, I thought and wrote that they are alive in the bowels of the earth, but I have been adjusted on this matter. So, at the outset, I must state that these souls are dead and in the grave, waiting for the first resurrection into immortality. What proof do we have of this conclusion?

First, they have been slain, so they are dead, not alive. If we agree with Solomon that **the dead do not know anything** (Ecclesiastes 9:5), then these souls must not know anything either.

Second, the altar was the place upon which the sacrifices were offered, which indicates that these souls suffered death, meaning their blood was poured out on the altar of the martyrs.

The soul is the seat of sensations or the experience of the body; kill the body, that is, pour out its blood, and the soul ceases as well, for the soul is in the blood.

For the soul of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul. (Leviticus 17:11 DNT)

When a sacrifice was made on the altar to make atonement for the souls of the sons of Israel, the blood of the animal flowed through the grating and below the altar. Consequently, the blood of these souls, as martyrs, was poured out, and it is the blood that actually sits under the altar and cries out.

Third, their cry is like the blood of righteous Abel and of all the martyrs' blood (Luke 11:50-51) that cries out from the ground. Abel is not crying out, but the voice (testimony) of his spilt blood is crying out (Genesis 4:10). It is merely figurative language.

Fourth, it is the word of their testimony that cries out, for these martyrs did not love their life when faced with death.

"And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death." (Revelation 12:11 NASB)

The souls under the altar are ones who will surely gain their life or **eonian life** in the coming kingdom of Christ, for they were willing to literally lose their soul life for the sake of gaining the Kingdom of Christ in the age to come.

(25) "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. (26) "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? (27) "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. (Matthew 16:25-27 NASB)

They are in the camp of the great cloud of witnesses, ones who died without receiving the promises and who await *in* death the better resurrection, not only to immortal life but to eonian life, a life in the age to come.

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us... (Hebrews 12:1 NASB)

They are also in the camp of the ecclesia in Smyrna who were told to be faithful until death and who did not fail.

'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.' (Revelation 2:10 NASB)

Finally, they are in the camp of the beheaded souls that will reign with Christ for a thousand years.

(4) Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (5) The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. (6) Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4-6 NASB)

Consequently, there is no reason to view these martyrs as being alive under an altar. Can you imagine the scene if this were taken literally? It is simply a figurative statement indicating that their blood will be avenged by God. It is stated that more martyrs will follow, and it will be an encouragement to them to endure even unto death.

Only the Lord knows, but some of us may yet be called upon to die for the Lord Jesus before His kingdom comes. If so, may we take comfort knowing that our blood will cry out along with all those faithful servants that preceded us! It will be like a sleep. Our next conscious moment will be looking into the face of the love of our life, the very **Author and Perfecter of faith** (Hebrews 12:2).

Let us be ever mindful that **Christ alone has immortality** (1 Timothy 6:16), for **no one has ascended into heaven except He Who descended out of heaven** (John 3:13), and His name is **Jesus the Anointed One, the Messiah, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Son of God, and the Son of Man.**