

Remember You Have a Soul !

By Malcolm H. Watts

The first chapter of Genesis tells us that man was created 'in the image of God', a phrase which is explained by the term 'likeness' (Gen 1:26,27). This likeness could not have consisted in physical form, for God has neither body nor bodily parts; and, indeed, we are told earlier in this same chapter that God is the opposite of body or matter - he is a 'spirit', (Gen 1:2; cf Jn 4:24). It is therefore in man's superior spiritual nature that we find the true point of conformity to God.

From the more detailed account of man's creation in Genesis 2:7, we gather that God formed man's body from 'the dust of the ground' and that then, in a special work of creative power, he com-

municated to that body 'the breath of life': literally, 'the breath of lives'. This suggests that man was given something more than the inferior creatures - something which rendered him capable of enjoying a very different kind of life. So it was, that 'man became a living soul'.

While the expression 'living soul' or 'animated being' may be applied to the lower animals (Gen 1:20,21,24; 2:19), it is clear that, by virtue of the distinct act of the Creator, man's soul had a peculiar excellence and is of a nobler, higher order. 'Soul', as it relates to man, is the spiritual element in human nature: hence, 'soul' and 'spirit' are synonymous and interchangeable terms (Gen 2:7 cf Job 32:8; Is 42:5). Indeed, this is man's distinguishing feature. He has, or rather, he is a soul.

Accordingly, theologians speak of the bipartite nature of man, by which they mean that man consists of two parts: body and soul. This doctrine finds support, not only in the narrative of creation, but also in a number of other passages such as the following: 'Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of

In the act of worship, the soul is lifted up to God in prayer (Ps 25:1; 86:4): it receives and retains the doctrines of his Word, and it also delights in him, with solemn and joyful praise (Ps 119:165; 35:9; 103:1,2,). For his part, God is pleased in worship to make himself known to the soul. As Scripture teaches,

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my body for the sin of my soul?' (Mic 6:7); 'Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to kill both body and soul in hell' (Matt 10:28. See also: 1 Cor 6:20; 7:34; 2 Cor 7:1).

What then is the soul? It is really that which constitutes man's person and therefore includes the understanding, the will, and the affections. Thus, Psalm 139:14, 'That my soul knoweth right well'; Psalm 72:2, 'My soul refused to be comforted'; and Song of Solomon (Song 1:7), 'O thou whom my soul loveth'.

It is the soul which enables us to hold communion with God, which explains why we are exhorted to seek him with our souls (Deut 4:29). 'With my soul', says the prophet, 'have I desired thee in the night: yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early' (Is 26:9).

'he restoreth my soul'; 'thy comforts delight my soul'; 'he satisfieth the longing soul' (Ps 23:3; 94:19 cf 116:7; 107:9; cf Is 58:11; Jer 31:25). It is just as the Lord said, 'God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit' (Jn 4:24).

What blessedness the soul is capable of enjoying! God's presence can fill it; and, by secret impressions and intimations, the sense of his love can be wonderfully imparted, producing not only comfortable assurance but also expectation of far greater blessedness (Is 57:15; Rom 5:5; Eph 3:17-21).

Only sin prevents the enjoyment of such experience and it does so by contracting guilt and pollution. The former renders us liable to punishment for our sins: the latter spreads corruption throughout our nature, so that we can do nothing but sin.

In both these connections, consider carefully the following scriptures: 'The soul that sinneth, it shall die' (Ezek 18:20); 'Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil' (Rom 2:8,9); 'The soul of the wicked desireth evil' (Prov 21:10); 'There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him, can defile him; but the things which come out of him (that is, out of his soul) those are they that defile the man' (Mk 13:15). Who can deliver our souls from this wretched state and condition?

The Gospel declares that only Jesus Christ can. By his work for us, he has secured our deliverance from condemnation (Rom 4:25; Eph 1:7); and by his work in us, he effects a thorough and complete renewal (1 Cor 6:11; 2 Cor 5:17). The result is that we are restored to fellowship with God: 'And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ' (1 Jn 1:3).

As the 'Father of spirits' (Heb 12:9), God has a real concern for our souls. He issues particular commands concerning them, as, 'Only take heed to thyself and keep thy soul diligently' (Deut 4:9). He makes promises to them, saying, 'Let your soul delight itself in fatness' (Is 55:2). Moreover, the Lord gives himself to believing souls, as their 'portion' (Lam 3:24); showing them his intimate 'love' (Is 38:17; cf Ps 31:7; 35:3) and affording them all needful provision and protection (Ps 63:8; 121:7). Truly, 'the LORD is good

unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him' (Lam 3:25).

This is true even when our bodies begin to fail. By fresh supplies of grace, God revives and strengthens our souls; so 'though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day' (2 Cor 4:16).

At last, of course, the inevitable happens and death takes place. Scripture teaches that, at that time, there is a separation of soul from body: 'Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it' (Eccl 12:7). The point has already been made that - unlike the animals - man has not only a material body but also an immaterial soul. It is in death that this difference becomes all-important, for while the 'spirit' or 'life' of an animal perishes with its body, the human 'spirit' survives to enter an eternal state. Solomon again writes: 'Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?' (Eccl 3:21).

The soul is immortal. In death, it does not 'die' with the body, but it actually 'departs' from the body; thus, with respect to Rachel's death, we read: 'And it came to pass, as her soul was departing (for she died) that she called his name (i.e. her new-born son's name) Ben-oni' (Gen 35:18; cf 1 Kings 17:22). The apostle Paul anticipated his own death with the words,

'I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ: which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you' (Phil 1:23,24; cf 2 Tim 4:6).

Our Lord Jesus Christ, with the prospect before him, entrusted his soul to his heavenly Father, saying, 'Father into thy hands I commend my spirit'; and according to Luke, the gospel historian, after saying this, 'he gave up the ghost (or, spirit)' (Lk 23: 46; cf Matt 27:50; Jn 19:30).

A similar prayer was offered by Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Under a veritable hail of stones, he cried out, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit' (Acts 7:59). That such prayers were answered, there cannot be the slightest doubt. We are led to believe that, at death, the souls of God's people are immediately 'received' by God

outside the body. Christ emphatically asserted this truth before the Sadducees (who denied the very existence of the soul, Acts 23:8,9). Alluding to the fact that hundreds of years after their deaths God was still 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob', our Lord argued that they must be still alive and awaiting a glorious resurrection, for God cannot, with any propriety, be called 'a God of the dead': he can only be a God to those who actually exist - 'a God of the living'. Hence, our Lord affirms of the believing dead generally that 'they all live unto him' (Lk 20:37,38)

This same truth is taught by the apostle Paul, who writes: 'Our Lord Jesus Christ... died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep (that is, whether we are alive or dead), we should live together with him' (1 Thess 5:10).

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into the other world's 'glory' (Ps 49:15; 73:24); and not only by God, it seems, for Christ spoke of friends, who have gone on before us, joyfully welcoming us into our heavenly home. 'When ye fail', he said, 'they (will) receive you into everlasting habitations' (Lk 16:9).

Undoubtedly then, the soul is able to live

After death, the soul lives: indeed, it is very much alive. While the body 'sleeps' in the grave until the morning of the resurrection (Dan 12:2; Jn 11:11-14; Acts 13:36), the soul is fully conscious and active in what is often called 'The Intermediate State' (that is, the state between death and resurrection). For proof of this, consider that remarkable event - the

Transfiguration. Accompanied by three disciples, our Lord went up Mount Hermon, near Caesarea Philippi, where, we are told, his appearance was mysteriously and gloriously changed. All of a sudden, Moses and Elijah joined him there in the glory and we are informed that they 'spoke of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem' (Lk 9:28-31). Now what is so significant is that Moses had actually died about 1500 years before and had been buried in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth-peor (Deut 34:5,6). It was therefore his soul which appeared; but his soul was perfectly able to communicate with others and to share the experience of the divine glory. Alive? Most certainly. Conscious? Without a shadow of a doubt.

Conscious existence after death is confirmed by Christ's promise to the dying thief. Christ led that converted man to expect an entrance into Paradise (another name for heaven, 2 Cor 12:2,4) some time later that same day. 'Today', he said, 'thou shalt be with me in Paradise' (Lk 23:43). On this promise of our Lord, Dr. Henry Alford comments as follows: 'What consolation would it have been to him, what answer to his prayer, to be remembered when Jesus came into his kingdom, if these words implied that he should be unconsciously sleeping while the Lord was enjoying His triumph! Therefore we may safely say that the so-called "sleep of the soul", from the act of death till the resurrection, has no foundation in that which is revealed to us'.

According to biblical teaching, then, the disembodied spirit is in a state of full consciousness, capable of being 'comforted' (Lk 16:25). For the Christian, to be 'absent from the body' (in death) is only to be 'present with the Lord' (after death), but the question arises: Can the soul enjoy the experience? The answer can only be in the affirmative. In fact, this very same scripture (2 Cor 5:8) says that Christians are 'willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord'. Now it is impossible to believe that Paul and other Christians considered death preferable, if after death the soul was totally insensible (cf Phil 1:23). Christ is not in a state of unconsciousness; and if we go to be 'with him', it follows that we too will be fully conscious, able to know and feel the joys of his presence. As John wrote in the book of Revelation, 'Blessed (or 'Happy' - a felt emotion) are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth' (Rev 14:13).

The orthodox doctrine, therefore, is that even if the soul is 'out of the body', it can be 'caught up into Paradise', there to see 'visions' (or, sights) and to hear 'unspeakable words' (2 Cor 12:1-4).

Are we then to assume that souls separated from the bodies have some kind of form or appearance? Well, Moses was seen on the Mount of Transfiguration and, in our Lord's description of the world of spirits, the rich man and Lazarus were both clearly visible and recognizable. It

would seem that like those celestial spirits called 'angels' (Heb 1:14), human spirits can manifest themselves so as to be visible to others (cf. Gen 19:1; Lk 1:28,29; Jn 20:11,12).

In support of this, we can refer to several other scriptures. For example, in Luke's Gospel, we are told that, on seeing the risen Christ, the disciples first thought 'they had seen a spirit'; and our Lord did not for one moment deny the possibility, but he simply said, 'a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have' (Lk 24:36-39). John, on the Island of Patmos, was afforded a unique sight of the glorified spirits of heaven. 'I saw the souls', he says; and, a little later, he says again: 'After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb...' (Rev 6:9;7:9).

It is, perhaps, impossible to describe the glory of such souls. Sufficient to say, that they are, at death, perfected in holiness. Hence, the author of Hebrews makes mention of 'the spirits of just (or justified men) made perfect' (Heb 12:23). In this state they will be preserved until the Second Coming, when Christ will then bring with him all the souls of his people. As we read in the first Thessalonian epistle - 'them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him' (1 Thess 4:14). Having returned to this world, Christ will call their bodies from their graves and, through di-

vine power, 'the dead in Christ shall rise first'. Their souls being now re-united with their bodies, they shall join with the living in Christ's presence - and so 'we shall ever be with the Lord' (1 Thess 4:16,17).

Christians have a glorious hope, but what of non-Christians? Their souls cannot die either. When the body fails, they shall be driven to their own place (Job 18:18), a place of torment (Lk 16:23,28), where they shall be reserved unto the Day of Judgment (2 Pet 2:9). On that Day, their souls will be summoned from their prison-house and their bodies will be raised in all their vileness (Dan 12:2); and then, standing before the terrible face of their Judge (Rev 20:11,12), they shall hear their doom pronounced - 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matt 25:41).

In view of the unspeakable happiness of believers and the unspeakable misery of unbelievers, I do urge any unconverted reader immediately to repent and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Believe me, there is nothing more important than the salvation of your soul.

Where will you spend Eternity?
This question comes to you and me!
Tell me, what shall your answer be -
Where will you spend Eternity?

Turn and believe this very hour,
Trust in the Saviour's grace and power:
Then shall your joyous answer be,
Saved through a long Eternity!

Eternity! Eternity!
Where will you spend Eternity?