

Is the Soul Immortal?

by Danny Brown

Doctrine of Soul-Sleeping

"The wages of sin is death. But God, who alone is immortal, will grant eternal life to His redeemed. Until that day death is an unconscious state for all people." (Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Belief #25.)

"Death is a Sleep. Death is not complete annihilation; it is only a state of temporary unconsciousness while the person awaits the resurrection. The Bible repeatedly calls the intermediate state a sleep." (What Seventh-day Adventist Believe, pg 352)

"The Scriptures clearly teach that the dead are unconscious between death and the resurrection – at the second coming of Christ" (Debate Proposition affirmed by C. T. Russell)

"Speaking of the death of the man He enters into unconsciousness." (Let God Be True, pg 67.)

"If the human soul is brought into existence by God's combining the human body made from all the elements of the earth with the 'breath of life,' what happens when that breath of life is separated from the human body? The Creator's written Word answers that question also. It says that the human soul dies, ceases to exist." (Things in Which it is Impossible for God to Lie, pg 143-144)

As you can see by the quotations, the false doctrine of soul sleeping is taught by the Seventh-day Adventist and Jehovah's Witnesses. There are others scattered about who hold the same views.

Many Bible passages are appealed to as support for this doctrine. We will notice a few representative arguments that are used to support the doctrine that the soul or spirit of man is mortal and is not conscious or does not exist after death:

Argument No.1: The apostle Paul makes two statements regarding God as having immortality. One is found at 1 Timothy 1:17, and reads: "Now unto the King, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen." The other is found at 1 Timothy 6:16, where he states, "Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see; to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen." The argument is made from the texts just quoted that Jehovah God alone is the only one that has always been immortal and really possesses immortality.

Answering the argument: (Remember one does not answer Scripture, one believes Scripture, we answer the arguments that are made.) The argument fails to note two things: First, God is not the only one who possesses immortality. It is said of angels that they cannot die. (Luke 20:36); secondly, the passage teaches that God only hath immortality. He does not have mortality. Men have both mortality and immortality. Men have a mortal body and an immortal spirit that gives life to the body. (see the argument below)

Argument No.2: The terms usually rendered 'soul' and 'spirit' in the Bible occur more than 1,600 times, but never in association with the words 'immortal' or 'immortality.'

Answering the argument: The words 'soul,' when used as an equivalent for spirit, and the word 'spirit' are never associated with the words 'mortal' or 'mortality' in Scripture. It is the body that is mortal.

Argument No.3: "For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten." (Eccl 9:5) The argument is made that the "dead know not anything,' therefore they are either unconscious or have ceased to exist.

Answering the argument: First, If this passage is to be taken at face value, as an absolute, without any other passages to bear on it to modify or explain it, then there is no "more a reward" for the dead. For whatever applies to "know not anything" applies to "neither have they any more a reward." Unrestricted, this passage would deny the resurrection and hope of eternal life. Second, the context shows that the passage under consideration is limited to the dead understanding what is transpiring on earth (under the sun). The dead no longer have any knowledge of events on the earth, they had their time under the sun, and have now left their earthly existence. Third, "And with Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, that were called, and they went in their simplicity and they knew not anything." Were these 200 men unconscious as they marched along? (see 1 Sam 20:39; Job 8:9); Fourth, Consciousness is the property of the spirit, not of the body. (1 Cor 2:11) The body returns to dust, but the spirit, the knowing part, the conscious part returns to God. (Eccl 12:7) Thus living after death.

Argument No.4: "For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man has no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." (Eccl 3:19-20) The argument is that there is no difference between man and beast after death, both cease to exist. Man, at death, is like the little dog rover, dead all over.

Answering the argument: If man is no higher than the beast, why is it unlawful to kill a man, but not unlawful to kill an animal. Actually the next verse reveals a difference between man and animals, "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 spirit of man goeth upward, returning to God, continuing to exist while the spirit of the beast goeth downward, ceasing to exist.

Argument No.5: "His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." (Psalm 146:4) The argument is, since thoughts perish, man is unconscious in death.

Answering the argument: The fact that thoughts perish does not indicate that man is unconscious or that he ceases to exist. "Let the wicked man forsake his thoughts." (Isa 55:7) Must the wicked cease to think, become unconscious? "My days are past, my purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart." (Job 17:11) Even though Job's thoughts were broken off, he had not ceased to exist or become unconscious.

Defining Death

The materialist defines death, not as a separation of body and spirit, but as unconsciousness. "Death is not complete annihilation. It is only a state of temporary unconsciousness while the person awaits the resurrection." Again, "The soul has no conscious existence apart from the body." (Seventh-Day Adventist believe . . ., pg 552, 553)

On the other hand the Bible says, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (James 2:26) Scripturally, death is a separation of body and spirit. The body, which is mortal (Rom 8:11) dies, returns to the dust from whence it came and the spirit, the conscious part of man, does not die, but returns to God (Eccl 12:7). Death is defined by J. H. Thayer, in his Greek-English Lexicon as: "the death of the body, i.e. that separation (whether natural or violent) of the soul from the body by which the life on earth is ended" (pg 282). W. E. Vine defines death as: "the separation of the soul (the spiritual part of man) from the body (the material part), the latter ceasing to function and turning to dust." (Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words)

For definitions of Man, Body, Soul and Spirit, see last months editorial in The Preceptor.

Death does not indicate annihilation or cessation of existence for the resurrection is defined as "a raising up." If death were a complete cessation of existence there would not be a resurrection but a re-creation.

Proof of Consciousness Beyond Death

There are many tried and true arguments that prove that the spirit (soul) is conscious after death and before the resurrection. For example:

Argument No.1: Jesus prophesied that he would die and in three day he would raise himself from the dead. "Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple and in

three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body." (John 2:19-21) He died and rose again on the third day. Question: If he were unconscious after death, how would he have known when three days were up? And how would he have raised himself up?

Argument No.2: "The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the Lord that seek him: your heart shall live forever." (Psalm 22:26) The heart is said: to believe (Rom 10:9); to understand (Matt 13:15); to be the seat of the emotions (Matt 22:37); that from which one is to obey (Rome 6:17) and the conscience of man (1 John 3:19-21). The heart is the inward or spirit part of man (1 Pet 3:4). David, the sweet singer of Israel, said that the heart (the spirit, the inward part of man) would live forever. Thus the spirit, the inward part of man does not cease to exist at death.

Argument No.3: "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? She (Martha, db) saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world. (John 11:25-27) Martha, like all other humans, kept her appointment with death (Heb 9:27). Her body returned to the dust. Her spirit departed the body, it did not cease to exist or become unconscious. She lives beyond death.

Argument No.4: "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." (Matt 22:30-32) Jesus spoke of the time when Moses was called to deliver Israel. (Ex 3:6) This was hundreds of years after the death of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, yet God stilled claimed to be their God. God is not the God of the dead but of the living. Jesus' argument goes like this:

Major Premise: God is not the God of the dead but of the living.

Minor Premise: God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

Conclusion: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are not dead but living.

Thus the spirits of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob continue a conscious existence beyond the loss of their mortal bodies. God said, I am (present tense) not I was (past tense) their God.

Argument No.5: "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 7:38-39) Death cannot separate us from the Love of God. However, if death is annihilation or a ceasing to exist, it would. Therefore death is not an annihilation. We, like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, continue to exist beyond death.

Argument No.6: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matt 10:28) Man can kill the body but not the soul (spirit). It is evident that the soul and the body do not form an indivisible union. The soul (spirit) continues an existence beyond death.

Argument No.7: A story of the Rich Man and Lazarus: "There was a certain rich man, . . . there was a certain beggar named Lazarus . . . the beggar died . . . the rich man also died, and was buried. And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham saith . . ." (Luke 16:19-31) Jesus never told a falsehood to illustrate a truth. The story is not a fable. Even if this is a parable (which it is not) it is still the truth. Lazarus and the rich man both died. After death both had a conscious existence. Abraham said to the rich men, "Son, remember." Not only was the rich man conscious but also had the ability to remember his life on earth.

Argument No.8 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." (2 Cor 4:16-18) The outward man is seen and is temporal. The inward man (the spirit, Eph 3:16) is not seen and is eternal. The outward man (body) is mortal and subject to death. The inward man (the spirit) is eternal and survives death.

Argument No.9: "Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me." (2 Pet 1:13-14) If Peter (the inner man, spirit or soul) and his tabernacle (body) are such that one cannot exist without the other, how could he put off his tabernacle, the body of flesh? Peter tells us that he would exist after he put off his tabernacle of flesh. Thus man can and does exist apart from the body.

Conclusion

God formed man from the dust of the earth and placed within him a spirit that gave life to and is expected to control the body of flesh. (Gen 1:26:27; 2:7; Zech 12:1; James 2:26) Man is a triune being composed of a body, a soul and a spirit. (1 Thess 5:23) The body is the tabernacle in which we live and at death will return to the dust from whence it came. The word "soul," like so many other words, has several meanings. It sometimes is used to refer to the animal life that man has on a par with animals. It sometimes refers to the whole man as a person, thus whatever can be affirmed of a person (hunger, desire, death etc.) can be affirmed of the soul. It is sometimes used as an equivalent of the spirit of man. The spirit is that part of man which the Divine Father places there at conception. It is that which is immortal and does not die. It is the body that dies when the spirit departs.

There are many reasons why the spirit may depart such as: a violent accident, being shot, because of sickness, it may be simply because of attrition, etc. In today's language we generally speak of the immortality of the soul because we use the word "soul" in the place of and as an equivalent of the spirit, of which God is the father. At death the body dies and will, in time, return to the dust of the earth, animal life ceases. The spirit, the inward man, continues a conscious existence. It returns to God. (Eccl 12:7). In reality, like Jesus at his death, it enters the hades world to await the resurrection of the dead. (Luke 16:19-31; Acts 2:27)

Death is an enemy. It is the worst thing that can happen to the body. It separates families and loved ones. It brings grief and mourning. It brings feelings of emptiness and helplessness. It is also an appointment for all. To the Christian it is not a calamity, but a passageway through which we pass on our journey to a better home where pain, sorrow, disappointments, tears, hunger and thirst are unknown. To the Christians Paul wrote: