

Theologian Paul on Life, Death, and Immortality

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"This magnificent Conditionalist Faith volume is characterized by your customary careful scholarship"— Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (book jacket).

A. "Christ Our Life" Is Post-Pentecostal Theme

It was not until after the Holy Spirit was poured out with power upon the apostles and the early disciples of our Lord that their minds were fully opened to perceive the larger scope of the sublime truth of Life Only in Christ. But when they did perceive and receive it fully, and when they knew and experienced the "power of his resurrection" (Phil. 3:10), they were lifted completely out of their former mediocrity and filled with a compulsive power and a zeal that nothing could withstand.

1. PROCLAIMED FIRST TO JEWS, THEN TO GENTILES

The doctrine of life through Christ was the "unspeakable gift" that they were impelled to make known to all men. This was what the angel first charged Peter and the other apostles to preach when he was released from prison at Jerusalem. Here was his impressive commission, given just after the Jews had killed the Prince of life (Acts 3:15): "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life" (Acts 5:20) —life in Christ, stubbornly rejected by the Pharisees, life through the resurrection, bitterly opposed by the Sadducees. Jesus' name and the power of His life must be made known to all men. This mandate they gladly obeyed. And this is precisely what Paul and Barnabas preached first to the Jews at Antioch. And when the chosen people refused to accept Jesus as the promised giver of "this life," the apostles solemnly said:

"It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy [by unbelief] of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). Turning to the Gentiles, they boldly proclaimed:

"For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (vs. 47, 48).

2. PAUL PREACHES WITH FUTILITY TO PLATONIC ATHENIANS

Paul, the great accession to the apostles' roster, sought to preach this same doctrine to the Athenians. He spoke to them of God as the one who "giveth to all life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25). But the minds of the Athenians were so filled with the fanciful notions of the Greek

poets and philosophers concerning the spirit world and the Innate Immortality of all souls that they scouted the idea of Immortality solely by a resurrection from the dead through Jesus Christ. Had he preached to them the Platonic doctrine of a spirit life, an immortal soul, or eternal blessedness or misery for all men forever, they would not have called him "a setter forth of strange gods" (v. 18), and a proclaimer of "new doctrine" (v. 19). That would have been what their own Platonic philosophy had taught them. But the doctrines of the day of judgment and the incredible resurrection of Jesus "from the dead" (v. 31), and of the coming resurrection of all the dead, and of immortality only through Christ were no more agreeable to them than they were to the Jews.

3. ROMANS: IMMORTALITY A GIFT THROUGH CHRIST

This majestic truth runs all through Paul's epistles. It was the mighty cable, as it were, upon which all the other doctrines of the gospel were suspended. Thus to the Romans, Paul preached that all, whether Jews or Gentiles, were under one common sentence of death; for all had "sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Those who had "sinned without law," must "perish without law" (Rom. 2:12), while those who had sinned under the law must be judged by the law. Death had "reigned" over all the children of Adam (Rom. 5:14). But by the grace of God there was hope. The gospel, which he was sent to preach, was "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (chap. 1:16) in Christ, the Life-giver. Specifically—"to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality [aphtharsian, "incorruption"], eternal life" (Rom. 2:7). To believers he says:

"What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death [the second death]; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:21-23).

Thus the proclamation of eternal life was central. There is no such thing as either spontaneous generation or spontaneous regeneration. The children of God are "begotten" by God Himself, as verily as the children of Adam are begotten by their natural progenitors. This new life concerns itself not with carnal and perishable things, but with spiritual and eternal things. Those who experience it are "led by the Spirit of God" (Rom. 8:14), and such are destined to be "glorified" (v. 17) through the "resurrection," with its "redemption of our body" (v. 23). They will not come into the "condemnation" of the second death (v. 1; chap. 5:16; cf. Rev. 2:11). Nothing will be able to "separate" them "from the love of God, which is in Jesus Christ" (Rom. 8:39), by whom and to whom they henceforth live as "heirs" of eternal life.

4. 1 CORINTHIANS: IMMORTALITY MUST BE "PUT ON."

The same emphasis on eternal life is equally marked in both of Paul's epistles to the Corinthians. In the first epistle he shows how impossible it is for human reason alone to attain any true knowledge of the gospel. How foolish the truth of eternal life through a crucified Saviour seems to natural man—"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, be cause they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). But Paul was "determined" to know nothing among them but "Jesus Christ, and him

crucified" (v. 2), and that through His death and resurrection we might have eternal life. Finally, coming to the climax of the great and glorious doctrine of the resurrection, Paul dwells upon it at length, and shows how it is assured to us by the death and resurrection of Christ Himself. If this assurance of resurrection through Christ were taken away, we would be of all men the "most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19), for we would then have no hope of any life beyond the grave. All who have fallen asleep in Jesus would have "perished" (v. 18), become extinct—not in a state of endless sin and misery. Not a word to that effect. Paul attempts to tell the nature of the spiritual bodies we shall take on at the resurrection, to show how glorious and how incorruptible they will be, and how entirely different from our gross fleshly bodies (v. 37), which are fitted only for earthly natures, and could not possibly enter the coming kingdom of God.

"So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural [Ipsuchikon] body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual [pneumatikori] body"¹ (1 Cor. 15:42-44). Then Paul shows how, simultaneously with the resurrection of the righteous dead, those who are alive at Christ's second coming will be changed:

"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible [aphthartoi, "immortal"], and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal [thneton, "subject to death"] must put on immortality [athanasiari]. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (vs. 52-55).

Mark the form of the expression, "This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (v. 53). Surely if incorruption, if immortality, must be "put on" (enduo, "to put on," as a garment), it could not have been possessed before.

5. 2 CORINTHIANS: CENTRAL THEME, CHRIST OUR LIFE

Paul's second Corinthian epistle is equally filled with Christ and Him crucified, as the source of eternal hope to all His people. The great apostle is determined to know nothing else among them, waiting eagerly for the time when this mortality "might be swallowed up [kata-pino, "drink down," "swallow"] of life" (2 Cor. 5:4).

6. "ETERNAL LIFE" THEME RUNS THROUGH REMAINING EPISTLES

And so with all his other epistles, eternal life is the central theme. Note it:

"Reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:8).

"Your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:3, 4).

"Believe on him to life everlasting" (1 Tim. 1:16).

"Lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. 6:12).

"Our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality [aphtharsian] to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10).

"In hope of eternal life, which God . . . promised before the world began" (Titus 1:2).

"Heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (chap. 3:7).

7. PETER, JAMES, AND JUDE GIVE SAME EMPHASIS

And it should be added that Peter, James, and Jude follow on, offering salvation with the same "life" line—exhorting all to fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life. "He shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (James 1:12). "Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 21). It is life, life, life! But let us examine Paul, and his theology on life and death, more closely.

B. Heart of Pauline Theology—Gift of Life Instead of Destruction

The apostle Paul was unquestionably the most powerful human personality in the history of the Christian church—truly a spiritual and intellectual giant. He was chosen to write a sizable portion of the New Testament. In his writings he gave a more fully developed theology than any other apostle. He probes the deepest depths and rises to the highest heights of the mighty plan of redemption. He sweeps in all of God's majestic provisions of grace and redemption. He presents the light of salvation for the believer and the darkness of doom for the rejectors of God's grace. One can feel the pulsating heartthrobs throughout his mighty epistles.

1. REDEMPTION OF MAN BRINGS LIFE AND IMMORTALITY.

Paul did not have the privilege of the three years enjoyed by the other disciples in the school of Christ, the master teacher of life and immortality. Saul the persecutor became Paul the apostle when he encountered Christ in a vision on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). He spent a period of study and readjustment in Arabia (Gal. 1:17). But his teaching is identical with theirs—and that of Jesus—on the nature and destiny of man. In fact, he surpasses other disciples in the fullness, clarity, and depth of his presentations. Paul was clearly God's unique apostle not only to the Gentiles but to the Diaspora as well. With Paul, Christ was not only the center but the circumference of his preaching and teaching, as well as of his personal faith and life. The essence of his message was humanity redeemed, justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, who by His life, death, and resurrection opened the way and provided the means for man's restoration and his reception of eternal life and Immortality in Christ, bestowed at the resurrection or at translation, at the Second Advent.

2. TREMENDOUS SCOPE OF SALVATION

The three foundational facts of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, in their relation to sin and redemption for man, clearly constitute the sum and substance of the teaching and preaching of the great apostle. In his writings there is clarity and certainty in the provision of Life Only in Christ. That is unquestionably the essence of Paul's gospel. Here the highest, broadest, and deepest lessons in the school of grace are set forth. Here is the culmination of revealed apostolic truth. Here is the powerful portrayal of the divine philosophy of salvation in contrast with all human foibles and sophisms.

3. OPENING MESSAGE Is ON ESCHATOLOGY

Paul wrote the Thessalonian epistles about A.D. 52. These epistles and the Corinthians, written some six years later, are replete with the message of life, death, and Immortality. This was the earliest Pauline emphasis. And Paul was the most explicit and extensive of all the New Testament writers in holding steadfastly to the original Biblical position that man is not naturally immortal. He maintains that man can become so only by a new infusion of life. He is not so by nature; he becomes so by faith and transforming grace. Paul had little success in Athens, the city of Socrates and Plato. He would doubtless have secured a hearing if he had proclaimed the immortality of the soul and its corollaries. Moreover, he demonstrated here the futility of meeting reason with reason, logic with logic, and philosophy with philosophy. Thenceforth he was a preacher of Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2), risen, ascended, mediating, judging, and coming again to raise the dead, reward the righteous, and punish the wicked with everlasting destruction.

4. PUNISHMENT OF WICKED Is TOTAL DESTRUCTION

Twenty times the apostle Paul declares that the wages of sin is death—absolute death, cessation of life. Twenty times he tells us that death is the punishment for sin—and also in a dozen places that life and immortality are special privileges, as in Romans 6:23 and 8:11. Twenty-five times Paul spells out the fate of the wicked, and constantly uses terms connoting total destruction such as: "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God . . . : who shall be punished with everlasting destruction [olethron aionion, "eternal ruin, death"] from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints" (2 Thess. 1:8-10).

Paul speaks once of the resurrection of the wicked, or "unjust" (Acts 24:15). But their survival will be of such short duration that he usually passes it over in silence. In his Epistle to the Hebrews it is stated: "We are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." "For our God is a consuming fire" "which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb. 10:39; 12:29; 10:27). That which God consumes He does not allow still to exist. After the execution of the judgment, death will have no more victories, but will itself be abolished (Rev. 20:14). Immortality, Paul asserts, cannot begin before "this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:54; cf. 1 Tim. 6:16), which change takes place when Christ comes the second time. Here is Paul's key declaration in his earliest epistle:

"The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:16, 17). - That is a bird's-eye view of the Pauline witness. Now let us examine Paul's testimony from the eschatological side.

The present writer accepts the arguments in favor of Pauline authorship as more weighty than those for all other candidates put together.

C. Places All Messages in Graphic Eschatological Setting

Paul is careful even in his very first epistles to place his message in a graphic, well-defined eschatological setting. The Thessalonian epistles set forth the transcendent scenes of the Second Advent, with its glorification of the saints at the resurrection and subsequent destruction of all sinners. This is presented as the climax of the divine plan of the ages—the end events being the culmination of a sweeping outline that takes in the centuries and leads up to the devastating scenes of the day of the Lord. That is therefore the initial New Testament emphasis.

1. SECOND ADVENT INVOLVES RESURRECTION AND TRANSLATION

Paul leads into the Second Advent that closes the age. He depicts the Lord Jesus descending from Heaven and calling forth from their graves the sleeping saints, and catching up and translating the saints then living, to meet Him and thenceforth be together forever with their Lord. Such is Paul's earliest depiction.

2. "DAY OF THE LORD" BRINGS "SUDDEN DESTRUCTION" TO SINNERS

Paul then immediately refers to the "day of the Lord," as coming unexpectedly to many, like "a thief in the night." It brings "sudden destruction" (1 Thess. 5:2, 3) to the wicked. But he assures the spiritually alert that that day will not overtake them as a thief (v. 4).

3. ATTENDANT CIRCUMSTANCES OF ADVENT PORTRAYED

In his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians Paul picks up the portrayal at the same point, the Second Advent, adding details as to the manner of that coming, but this time he stresses the terror and destruction visited upon the living wicked when Christ appears, in contrast with the glorification and rejoicing of the saints: "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction [olethron aidnion, "eternal ruin, death"] from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe" (2 Thess. 1:7-10).

4. COMING APOSTASY PAUL'S GRAVE CONCERN

In Second Thessalonians 2, Paul continues his subject of the "day of the Lord." He warns against the illusion that this tremendous "day" is just at hand. First, he says, there will be a dread "falling away" (apostasia, foretold by Christ in Matthew 24 and Daniel 7) and the appearing, historically, of the "man of sin," or "son of perdition" (2 Thess. 2:3), the "Antichrist," whose activities he describes in these words: "Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (v. 4).

Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he had forewarned them orally of the great apostasy to come into the Christian church, which would be held back only by the iron might of a unified pagan Rome (vs. 5, 6). But that would pass and the apostasy would appear. He declares that the seeds of spiritual departure were already germinating in his own day:

"For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now lets [katecho, "to restrain," "to hold back"] will let [restrain], until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming' (vs. 7, 8). This power would be characterized by signs and wonders and deceit, becoming an overpowering "strong delusion" (vs. 9-11). Appealing to the church to hold to the "truth" they had been taught, he solemnly warns that those who believe and receive this "lie" will be "damned" (vs. 11, 12). That is Paul's teaching on the "last things," in the setting of the antecedent great apostasy that would be established before the Second Advent, and would cease only with the second coming of Christ at the end of the age.

5. DIFFERENTIATES BETWEEN RESURRECTION OF RIGHTEOUS AND WICKED

The first Corinthian epistle likewise opens with a reference to "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:7). Then man's usurping judgment will give way to God's just and sovereign judgment. Chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians is the great Second Advent and resurrection-translation classic. Paul first lays down this basic principle concerning the resurrection: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (v. 22). The resurrection is universal. But the dead are raised in two groups. Paul explains that "they that are Christ's" come forth at His second coming (v. 23). But not all are Christ's. John the revelator says that the wicked will not come forth until the second resurrection (Rev. 20:5, 6). That is the resurrection of the "unjust" (Acts 24:15), or the resurrection unto "damnation" (John 5:29), as Christ expressly denominated it. Then, when the "end comes," all rule and authority and power is subjected to Christ (1 Cor. 15:24-28). And this includes the "last enemy" of mankind, which is "death" (v. 26). Thus the fearsome reign of death will cease at the Advent and resurrection. As to these bodies of ours:

"It [the body of the saint] is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption [aphtharsia, immortality]: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body [soma psuchikori]; it is raised a spiritual body [soma pneumatikon]" (vs. 42-44). Then we shall again bear the "image of the heavenly" (v. 49). And this is brought about through Christ, the "quick ening spirit" (v. 45). And now comes the tremendous passage concerning those who sleep in Jesus, together with those who are then living, who will be translated:

"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep [koimao, here, the sleep of death], but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible [phtharton, "perishable"] must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:51-54).

The whole picture is there: (1) The "last trump," (2) the resurrection of the sleeping saints, (3) the changing, or translation, of the living saints, (4) and for both, the "corruptible" putting on "incorruption" and the "mortal" putting on "immortality." The transformation and the victory are all through Jesus Christ our Lord.

6. OUR VILE BODIES CHANGED AT ADVENT

In Philippians Paul declares:

"Who [Christ] shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Phil. 3:21).

In 1 Timothy 1:16, 17 our believing in Christ unto "life everlasting" is coupled with the reminder that God alone is the "King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God." Only the Godhead has absolute, original, underived immortality. Man's immortality is derived and contingent, and is not received until the Second Advent.

7. SEDUCING SPIRITS IMPINGE ON GOD'S UNAPPROACHABLE IMMORTALITY

Then Paul turns to the characteristic developments of the "latter times," when "some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (chap. 4:1). This is reminiscent of the seductive lie and liar in Eden that beguiled the mother of the human race. There will be a revival in the "latter times," characterized by the power and persuasiveness of that first fatal deception. But Paul admonishes us to "lay hold on eternal life," and to see that we are kept "without spot . . . until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (chap. 6:12, 14).

He goes out of his way to declare again that the "King of kings, and Lord of lords" is the one "who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto" (v. 16). And his parting admonition to Timothy is to "lay hold on eternal life" (v. 19). It was not his inherently.

8. IMMORTALITY BROUGHT INTO Focus THROUGH GOSPEL

In 2 Timothy, Paul again mentions the second "appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10). It is thus clear that immortality has not been the inalienable possession of the human family since the Fall. It is a provision brought to light through the gospel. And the apostle speaks of his own persuasion that Christ is "able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that

day" (2 Tim. 1:12). And once more he adverts to the "last days" and tabulates a list of some nineteen telltale specifications that will characterize them (chap. 3:2-5). He avows that the Lord Jesus Christ will "judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom" (chap. 4:1). Again he forewarns that—"the time will come [in the "latter days"] when they will not endure sound doctrine . . . ; they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (vs. 3, 4). Then he stresses his own personal belief, and confession, that—

"there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (v. 8).

All rewards will be given together at the Second Advent. And in closing his letter to Titus, Paul twice refers to the "hope of eternal life" (Titus 1:2; 3:7), promised, he declares, "before the world began" (chap. 1:2). That is Paul's comprehensive testimony in its vital eschatological setting and frame work. In this he faithfully follows the pattern of Christ. And this is designed to be the pattern for every teacher of truth concerning the nature and destiny of man.

D. Pauline Portrayal and Usage of "Immortal" and "Immortality"

The term "immortality" is used but five times in Scripture, and "immortal" but once. All are in the New Testament, and all are Pauline.

1. ABSOLUTE IMMORTALITY IS ATTRIBUTE OF GOD ALONE.

Absolute immortality is an attribute belonging solely to God, along with His omnipotence, omniscience, and omni presence. These are exclusively His. "The blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality [athanasian, "incorruption"]" (1 Tim. 6:15, 16; cf. 1 Cor. 15:53, 54). The inescapable inference therefore follows that man does not possess the attribute of immortality by nature. It is not a natural characteristic of man. It is ever to be sought for (Rom. 2:7), and is always and only to be received as a gift (Rom. 6:23). In various passages the adjective "mortal" (thnetos) is applied to man (see Rom. 6:12; 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:53, 54; 2 Cor. 4:11; 5:4), while "immortal" is applied only to God. And with this agrees the solitary use of "immortal."

"Now unto the King eternal, immortal [aphtharto, "not liable to corruption"], invisible, the only wise God" (1 Tim. 1:17). There is thus perfect agreement in the Pauline testimony and fundamental harmony with the testimony of Christ, the other apostles, and the prophets.

2. CHRIST THE REVEALER OF IMMORTALITY TO MAN

The second basic truth essential for our understanding is Christ's relationship to it all. "By the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10). The eternal Son of God, then, has brought within the knowledge and grasp of man that everlastingness of perfect being, which is now the possession of God alone. Man is to share this at God's appointed time.

3. IMMORTALITY NOT PRESENT POSSESSION OF HUMANITY.

Immortality is someday ere long to be received by those who seek for it in God's way and upon whom He will bestow it as a gift. "To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life" (Rom. 2:7).

4. MAN, NOW MORTAL, TO PUT ON IMMORTALITY

That day of bestowal is drawing near: "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53). Obviously one does not put on what he already has inherently. But when will this bestowal take place?

5. RESURRECTION IS TIME OF PUTTING ON IMMORTALITY

The resurrection day is not far away, with its glorious, eternal victory, and its transformation for man. "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54).

It cannot be overstated that God is the sole present possessor of immortality. He is the source from which man, at present mortal, must obtain immortality. Christ is the revealer and channel of eternal life and immortality. He has brought to light the possibility and provision of attaining immortal life—it is provided in Him as the channel through which it may flow to us. Man is to seek for it, and the seeker will be rewarded. Man will put on immortality at the resurrection of the just. But it will always be derived, contingent immortality—not independent immortality. That is ever and only God's. And now let us look at the opposite side of the picture, through Paul's eyes.

6. THOSE NOT RECEIVING IMMORTALITY ARE DOOMED

Paul consistently refers to immortality as a goal, an objective, which lies before the righteous, who live in quest of immortality. On the contrary, the "wrath" (orge) of God inevitably awaits the unrighteous. And Paul faithfully depicts the awful doom of sin's retribution. Thus he contrasts the eternal life, which is the "gift of God" to man, with the final death, which is the "wages of sin" (Rom. 6:23).

"Who [God] will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath [orge], tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil" (Rom. 2:6-9).

The Greek word *aphtharsia*, here translated "immortality," is rendered "incorruption" in the Revised Version. *Aphtharsia* (literally "imperishability") and *aphthartos* (translated "incorruptible," "immortal") and their cognate opposites *phthora* and *phthartos* (translated "corruption," "dissolution," and "perishable") throw no small light on both the nature and the destiny of mortal man. All four words are related to the verb *phtheird*, translated "to destroy" in 1 Corinthians 3:17: "If any man defile the temple [body] of God, him shall God destroy

[phtheiro]." That is the other, the somber, the tragic, reverse side of the picture of Life Only in Christ.

7. IMMORTALITY PREDICATED ONLY OF GOD

It is never to be forgotten that absolute, underived immortality is predicated only of God. With Paul this word "immortal" (aph-thartos), meaning not liable to corruption, as elsewhere remarked, is never joined with the Greek words for "soul" or "spirit," although pneuma (spirit) occurs 385 times in the New Testament, and psuche (soul) 105 times, a total of 490 times. Furthermore, in the Old Testament immortality is never once predicated of ruach, for spirit (occurring 400 times), or nephesh, for soul (used 752 times), a combined grand total of 1,642 times! It is predicated of one Being only—God. This is basic theology. It is the revealed message of God. (Cf. Rom. 1:23; 1 Cor. 9:25; 15:22; 1 Peter 1:23; 3:4. Also 2 Tim. 1:10.)

And athanasia ("immortality") is expressly declared to be possessed by God alone (1 Tim. 6:16). It is not "put on" by man until the resurrection, when mortality shall be "swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:53, 54). Such is the beautiful unity, the inexorable logic, and sublime consistency of the theology of Paul, the master theologian of the centuries. "For this corruptible [phthartori] must put on incorruption [aph-tharsian], and this mortal [thneton] must put on immortality [athana-siari]. So when this corruptible [phtharton] shall have put on incorruption [aphtharsian], and this mortal shall have put on immortality [athanasian], then shall be brought to pass the saying . . . , Death [thanatos] is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:53, 54).