

IS THE SOUL IMMORTAL?

This is a large question for a question meeting. It would take an hour to discuss the soul properly. I will tell you what a Methodist bishop said, and perhaps that will be of great value to some. He was asked to give a definition and said, "A soul is without body, shape or parts; it has [Page Q667] neither interior nor exterior, and you could put a million of them in a nut-shell." He might equally as well have said a billion, or a thousand million, because the bishop merely described nothing. Without interior nor exterior—that is nothing. Without body, shape or parts—that is nothing. How can you fill a nut-shell full of all kinds of nothing?

According to the Bible the soul is a very different matter. We find that people, in discussing these matters, use soul and spirit interchangeably, sometimes one and sometimes another. But the Bible distinguishes, and we are not to mix these terms. You know what the body is, and what the spirit of life it *is*. The body of Adam was formed out of the dust of the ground. That was his form, his shape. God breathed into his nostrils the breath of lives (plural), the breath common to every living creature. The difference between Adam and the other creatures was not in the breath, or spirit of lives. Man had the same kind of spirit of life. The difference was that man had a finer organism. How do we know? Stand a man alongside of a dog. Look at their heads. The one slopes back; there is no place for the intellectual qualities at all, or at least a very small place for the thinking apparatus man has. He has more brain than the dog. If we could make a dog with the same head as a man, he would think the same as a man. But God did not endow the dog, or any other brute, with the same capacity as man. He was in God's likeness, because he gave him the superior mental powers. When the breath of life entered the organism man began to move his arms and hands, his brain began to work, he began to think. The Bible calls that the being, the individual; not the body, not the life, but the thing that results from these, the soul. The Bible always addresses the soul, not the body. You would never think of talking to my hand. You would think, "What does the hand know about it?" You do not address my brain, but my intellect. The brain is the centre of the intellectual power. It is that power you are addressing, not the matter of the brain. You are addressing me, a thinking personality.

As soon as the breath of life leaves, the body would be as before. The spark of life having gone there would be no soul. Where does the soul go? It would not go anywhere. We have a candle. You blow out the light (not out of the window), I mean you extinguish it. It does not go to some other place, but is simply extinguished. So with man. When the spark of life is extinguished the

soul is dead. The Bible says the soul is asleep, using a very beautiful figure of speech. God has provided for a future life. We say in one breath that the man is dead and in another we say he is merely asleep, because God has promised that he shall be awakened. It is not the body that shall be awakened; it shall return to the dust, and the spirit shall return to the God who gave it. But how could the spirit return to God unless it wiggles off in some way? The spirit of life is the privilege or power of life. This privilege was granted to Father Adam under certain conditions. As soon as he violated the conditions he forfeited the privilege. He did not die that minute. God allowed him to hold on to the spark of life as long as he could and fight the thorns and thistles, but when he died it was his no longer. It was in God's hands, as you might give a man an option on something. Suppose I give you an option [Page Q668] on my coat until to-morrow morning. Then I would say, the option is out; the privilege is broken. So man was given the privilege of living if he would continue in harmony with the Creator. That right which was given him passed to God when he died; it was no longer his right. When Adam's children were born they had only the spark of life which he had given them. When they died their right to life returned to the giver of life.

How can they ever get life? Another way has been provided, through the great love of God; and it is only by appreciating the very great love of God that anyone will ever have life again. He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son shall not see life. The whole arrangement is bound up in Christ. When Christ shall come to establish His kingdom, and the time for the awakening of the dead shall come, all shall come forth from death. Not that the body will be awakened; its elements may be scattered over the earth. What the Bible says is that God shall restore that soul. "Thou wilt not leave my soul in sheol." God raised Jesus from the dead; He did not leave His soul in death. So every human soul shall be raised, but not the body.

An infidel propounded the question. A man died and was buried at the foot of a large tree. Years afterward they had occasion to dig down at the base of that tree, and they found that the roots had absorbed the body, and had taken the shape of the man's body. The tree had been used for various purposes ; some had been shipped to different parts of the country, and how could that man get his body back? How could God resurrect that body? He was stumbling over thoughts which God never put in the Bible. The Scriptures inform us that God will give that man a body as it pleaseth Him. Those who are of the church will have spirit bodies, and the world will have human bodies. What the Lord guarantees is that the soul, the being, shall come back. God will see to it that the body produced will be a perfect counterpart of the one that went into the tomb.

A Human Soul

Many in reading the account of creation in Genesis have noted the fact stated that when God had formed man of the dust of the ground, and had communicated to him the breath (spirit) of life, the record is, "Man became a *living soul*." This statement to the average reader taken in connection with his general misconception of the meaning of the word "soul," as misrepresented to him by those who should have instructed him properly, and should have understood the subject themselves, is sufficient to bewilder him and leads him to think that somehow there is some basis for the prevalent error which he does not comprehend, but which he supposes his chosen theological teachers have investigated and proven beyond peradventure.

Not comprehending the meaning of the word *soul*, many feel at liberty to use it in a reckless manner, and hence they reverse the Scriptural statement and instead of speaking of man as *being* a soul, they speak of man as *having* a soul, which is a very different thought. It is necessary, therefore, that each truth-seeker should, so far as possible, divest his mind of prejudice on the subject, and especially with respect to things and features which he admits he *does not understand*; because it is the natural tendency to give attributes [E321] and powers to that which is mysterious and not comprehended. Thus the general idea of a soul is that it is wonderfully intelligent, possessed of wonderful powers, that it is indestructible, intangible, and incomprehensible.

A Methodist bishop is credited with having given the following definition of a soul, which certainly accords well with so-called "orthodox" theories, even if it is absurd when closely analyzed—"It is without interior or exterior, without body, shape, or parts, and you could put a million of them in a nutshell." These various things are predicated of a soul, to help fill out a theory which is wholly erroneous. The theory is that the soul is the real being, a spark of divinity, possessed of divine quality and intelligent life, etc., separate and apart from the body; and that it inhabits the human body for a time, and uses it for a house, and when the body is worn out or disabled abandons it. Inasmuch as no one ever saw a soul enter a body, and inasmuch as a soul cannot be found while it is in the body, by the most critical examination, and with all the improved appliances of the microscope, photograph and "X" rays, therefore it is supposed that it is "without a body, without shape, and without parts"; and since it is supposed to be so small that it cannot be distinguished by a microscope, it might as well be said that you could put fifty millions of them in a nutshell. Really, the bishop gave an excellent definition of *nothing*; and all will agree that a hundred millions of nothings could be put into the smallest kind of a nutshell and have room to spare.

But what foundation is there for such wild speculation? We answer, It is wholly unwarranted. It is the result of man's taking his own theory of a future life, and rejecting the divine theory and plan. Human theory says, There must be something which never dies, else there can be no future life. The divine theory says, The same God who created in the beginning is able to resurrect the dead. This is the conflict between the Word of God and all the human theories of earth amongst the civilized as well as amongst [E322] the barbarians: all human theories teach that man does not die, and hence has no need of a Life-giver and a resurrection. The Bible theory is that man does die, and that without the Life-giver, and without a resurrection, death would indeed end all, and there would be no future life.

It is to support its theory that the world, and all its religious books (including, we are sorry to say, the majority of works on eschatology written by professed Christians), teach the doctrine of the immortality of the soul—that there is a soul in man, possessed of a separate life from his body, and that it is immortal, indestructible, and therefore destined to an eternity of pain or pleasure. We come then to the inquiry:

What Is a Soul?

Examining this question from the Bible standpoint we will find that man *has* a body and *has* a spirit, but *is* a soul. Science concurs with the Scriptures in this. Indeed, one of the sciences, Phrenology, undertakes to treat the skulls of men and the lower animals as indexes and to read therefrom the natural traits and characteristics of the owners: and do not all men find themselves possessed of some ability in judging character physiologically? All can discern between the intellectual and the idiotic, between the kindly benevolent and the viciously brutal. Those who have not learned that *organism* (bodily form) is indissolubly connected with nature, character and disposition have made poor use of life's lessons and are unprepared to pass judgment on our topic or any other.

The word "soul," as found in the Scriptures, signifies *sentient being*; that is, a being possessed of powers of sense, sense-perception. With minds freed from prejudice, let us go with this definition to the Genesis account of man's creation, and note that (1) the organism or *body* was formed; (2) the *spirit of life*, called "breath of life," was communicated; (3) *living* [E323] *soul*, or sentient being, resulted. This is very simple, and easily understood. It shows that the body is not the soul, nor is the spirit or breath of life the soul; but that when these two were united by the Lord, the resultant quality or condition was living man, living being—a living soul, possessed of perceptive powers. There is nothing mysterious about this—no intimation that a spark of divinity was infused into humanity, any more than into the lower animals. Indeed, while

the creation of the lower animals is passed over and not particularly described, we may know that with them, as well, the process must have been somewhat similar. We know that there could be no dog without a dog organism or body, nor without spirit or breath of life in that body. The body of the dog that had never been animated would not be a dog; it requires first the infusion of the spark of life, the breath of life, then doghood begins. The same would apply to all animals.

In full accord with this, we now call attention to a fact which will surprise many; viz., that according to the Scriptural account every dog is a soul, every horse is a soul, every cow is a soul, every bird and every fish are souls. That is to say, these are all *sentient* creatures, possessed of powers of sense-perception. True, some of them are on a higher and some on a lower plane than others; but the word *soul* properly and Scripturally applies to creatures on the lower planes as well as to man, the highest and noblest—to fish, reptiles, birds, beasts, man. They are all souls. Mark, we do not say that they *have* souls, in the ordinary and mistaken sense of that term, yet they all do *have* souls, in the sense of having *life, being, existence*—they *are* living souls. Let us prove this:

In the *first, second and ninth chapters of Genesis* the words "living soul" are applied in the Hebrew language to the lower animals nine times, but the translators (as though careful to protect the false but common vagary respecting a soul, derived from Platonic philosophy) sedulously guarded their work, so that, so far as possible, the English [E324] reader is kept in ignorance of this fact—that the word *soul* is common to the lower creatures, and as applicable to them as to man in inspired Scripture usage. How else could it happen that in all of these cases, and in many other instances throughout the Scriptures, they have carefully covered the thought, by using another English word to translate the Hebrew word, which, in the case of man, is rendered "soul"? So carefully have they guarded this point that only in one place in the Bible is this word translated "soul," in connection with the lower creatures, viz., in [Num. 31:28](#), and there, very evidently, they were compelled to show the matter, by reason of the peculiar construction of the sentence—no other translation being reasonably possible. The passage reads:

"Levy a tribute unto the Lord of the men of war which went out to battle: one soul of five hundred, both of the persons and of the beeves and of the asses and of the sheep." Here it will be noticed that the word "soul" is used respecting the lower creatures as well as in reference to man; and so it would appear elsewhere in the Scriptures, had the translators been free from the warp and twist of their false theories on this subject.

Let us now notice the nine texts in Genesis in which the Hebrew original of the word *soul*(*neh-phesh*) occurs in connection with the lower animals:

"God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving [creeping] creature *that hath life* [Heb., *neh-phesh*—soul]." ([Gen. 1:20](#)) Note that the marginal reading is *soul*; and that this was on the fifth creative day or period, long before man's creation.

"God created great whales, and every living *creature* [Heb., *neh-phesh*—living *soul*] that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly." ([Gen. 1:21](#)) This also was in the fifth "day," before man's creation. These were *fish-souls*.

"God said, Let the earth bring forth the living *creature* [Heb., *neh-phesh*—living *soul*] after his kind—cattle and creeping thing and beast." ([Gen. 1:24](#)) These were dry-land [**E325**] souls, higher than the fishes—but man, human soul or being, had not yet been created.

"And God said....To every beast of the earth and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is *life* [living *soul*—*neh-phesh*] I have given every green herb for meat." ([Gen. 1:30](#)) Here the lower animals are specified, and it is distinctly declared that they are all living souls—in exactly the same terms that refer to man.

"Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air;...and whatever Adam called every living *creature* [Heb., living *soul*—*neh-phesh*], that was the name thereof." ([Gen. 2:19](#)) Comment here is unnecessary: there can be no question that *soul* is not exclusively a *human* part or quality, but rightly understood is applicable to all *sentient creatures* from the lowest to the highest—all creatures possessed of sensibilities.

"Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you...but flesh *with the life thereof* [Heb., flesh, *soul*—*neh-phesh*] which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat." ([Gen. 9:3,4](#)) Here the animals which man may eat are not only declared to possess soul or *being*, but their *blood* is said to represent their *existence, being* or *soul*, and hence man is forbidden to use blood as food—forbidden to cultivate blood-thirstiness.

"Behold I establish my covenant with you [Noah] and with your seed after you; and with every living *creature* [Heb., living *soul*—*neh-phesh*] that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth." ([Gen. 9:9,10](#)) A very plain statement that all living creatures are souls as well as man—though inferior to him in nature, organism, etc.

"This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living *creature* [Heb., living *soul*—*neh-phesh*]." ([Gen. 9:12](#)) What could be more explicit than this?

"I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living *creature* [Heb., every living *soul*—*neh-phesh*] of all flesh." [Gen. 9:15](#)

[E326]

The same expression exactly is repeated in **verse 16**. And there is no room for cavil as to the meaning when the veil of mistranslation is lifted and we catch the thought God wished us to receive from his Word.

We might similarly proceed through other books of the Bible, but we have quoted sufficient to establish our contention before any reasonable mind—that soul in Scriptural usage as properly applies to the lower animals as to man; and hence that all claims or theories built upon the idea that man's hopes of a future life and his present superiority over lower animals result from his being a *soul* and they not, is a false theory and needs radical reconstruction if we would see matters from the true standpoint of divine revelation.

But let no one misunderstand us to teach that because all living, moving creatures, from a mite to an elephant and from a tadpole to a whale are *living souls*, therefore all these must have a future life, either by a transfer to spirit conditions or by a resurrection future. Such a thought would be arrant nonsense—insanity—without a shadow of reason. Billions of living *souls* on these lowest planes of animal nature are born every minute, while other billions die every minute.

Our argument is that man is a *soul* or *being* of the highest order—the king and lord over the lower orders of souls or sentient beings, yet one of them—an earthly, human animal soul; and yet so grandly constituted originally (Adam) that he was properly described as in the *likeness* of God—the image of him that created him.

Man as a soul is differentiated from the lower animals or souls by reason of his higher *organism*: not merely is his superiority indicated by his upright form; it is witnessed to by his superior mental endowments, which are Godlike and are reflected in his countenance. It is in his mental and moral endowments rather than in physical form that man was created in divine likeness. While many of the lower orders of animal soul or being possess *reasoning powers* and demonstrate them in thousands of ways, yet each has a level [E327] beyond which no progress can be made; but man's reasoning powers are almost unlimited, because he was created an "*image* of God," "the likeness of him that created him." And notwithstanding man's fall into sin and his thousands of years of gross darkness and degradation we can still see

Godlikeness—especially in those who have accepted Christ's ministry of reconciliation to God, and have again become "sons of God," and who are seeking to be conformed to the image of God's dear Son.

To illustrate: horses, dogs and birds may be taught the meaning of many words so as to be able to understand many things pertaining to life's affairs. They often demonstrate their reasoning powers, and some are able to count—as high as twenty: but who would attempt to teach a horse or a dog or a bird algebra or geometry or astronomy? The highest of the lower animals can be taught a certain degree of moral honesty and obligation to their masters—not to kill sheep, not to bite, kick, etc., but who would attempt to teach his dumb brutes the Decalogue? They may be taught a certain kind of love for their master and his friends, but who would think of teaching them to love or worship God, or more than mere endurance of enemies who had despitefully used them.

The point to be noticed is that all these differences are not by reason of the lower animals having a different kind of *breath* or spirit of life, for as we have seen, "they have all *one breath*" ([Eccl. 3:19](#)); nor because man is a soul and the brute beast is not, for as we have seen they are all souls. But as we have found, and as all men are witnesses, each has a *different* bodily organism which gives to each his different characteristics, and which alone constitutes one higher and the other lower in the scale of intelligence. Notice, too, that not size and weight give excellence and superiority, else the elephant and whale would be the lords of earth; the excellence is in the "*organic quality*" represented chiefly in brain-structure and functions.

Man, therefore, is the highest type of earthly creature—"of the earth, earthy"—and his excellence consists in the superiority [E328] of his mental endowment—not a development, but a gift from his Creator.