



"The awful importance of this life is that it determines eternity."
—William Barclay

21-Oct-22

Already Immortal?

"And the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die" ([Genesis 3:4](#)).

This little, five-word sentence was [Satan](#) the Devil's opening salvo to convince Adam and Eve that they could disregard God's commands without consequence. From Eve's reply to his initial question in verse 1, she evidently understood both God's decree in Genesis 2:17 and His reasons for not wanting them to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It was the reason as Eve construed it, "lest you die" (Genesis 3:3), that the serpent pounced on with his famous lying contradiction.

Most people do not realize that Satan has been repeating this mantra ever since, and the vast majority of humanity has bought into it just as readily as our first parents in the Garden. The essence of Satan's lie is, "Go ahead and live as you like. Your actions have no lasting consequences because you are already immortal." Theologically, this belief is called the Doctrine of the [Immortality of the Soul](#), and most Christian churches around [the world](#) teach it.

The Bible, however, does not support it.

As early as Genesis 2:17, [God](#) tells us that humans can die, and the underlying implication is that death can be permanent: "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall *surely* die" (emphasis ours throughout). We find an even clearer set of divine statements in Ezekiel 18:4, where God says, "Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die." Just in case we fail to understand, He repeats Himself in verse 20.

We need to understand this foundational principle. God says that "the wages of [sin](#) [what we earn as a result of our ungodly choices in life] is death" ([Romans 6:23](#)). Certainly, this means that we will lose our physical lives. But what about that spiritual component in us, the one Job calls "the spirit in man" ([Job 32:8](#))? When we die, says Solomon, it "return[s] to God who gave it" ([Ecclesiastes 12:7](#)). But what then?

Speaking of the reward of the saved, [Jesus](#) declares, "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" ([John 6:54](#)). But what if a person refuses to sign on to His New Covenant? What happens to the inveterate sinner, the unbeliever, and the rebel? He says:

Cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. . . . Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. . . . And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. ([Matthew 25:30](#), 41, 46)

Notice the difference in His two judgments: The "unprofitable servant," the "cursed," the unrepentant sinner, is thrown into "outer darkness," "everlasting fire," and "everlasting punishment," while the righteous enjoy eternal life. Logically, the reward of the saved and the fate of the wicked cannot be the same - eternal life - meaning that the "everlasting punishment" of the wicked must be eternal death, not a neverending life of torment. Otherwise, God cannot be said to be just.

The apostle Jude makes an interesting comment in verse 7 of his epistle: "Sodom and Gomorrah . . . are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." The eternal fire that consumed those cities and

their people is no longer burning, but its results are eternally valid: The iniquitous inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah are still dead! Thus, eternal fire or "everlasting fire" does not mean a fire that never dies or one in which a person is eternally tormented but a consuming fire of which *the consequences* are eternal. One who dies in the everlasting fire of God's punishment of sinners will be eternally dead! Jesus' words in the [parables](#) in Matthew 25 refer to what Revelation 20:15 calls the "Lake of Fire": "And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire" (see also [Matthew 13:40-43](#), 49-50). Similarly, nothingness, the state of death, is aptly described as "outer darkness."

Of this fate, the author of Hebrew writes:

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. . . . It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. ([Hebrews 10:26-27](#), 31)

As Jesus Himself warns, "Fear Him who is able to destroy *both soul and body* in [hell](#)" ([Matthew 10:28](#)).

The human soul can die. We know the soul of every person will die once physically ([Hebrews 9:27](#)), the spirit returning to God for safekeeping until the [resurrection from the dead](#) and the judgment (see [Revelation 20:12-13](#)). However, in His justice and mercy, God will permanently destroy the souls of those who reject Him. "This is the [second death](#)" ([Revelation 20:14](#)), the final, eternal death for the - we hope - few who choose it over eternal life in God's Kingdom.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Benefits of the Third Resurrection](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The Lake of Fire (Second Death or Third Resurrection), dreadful as it initially appears, produces both immediate as well as ultimate benefits or good. As a deterrent against sin, the Lake of Fire has an immediate benefit for those who, after having accepted Christ's sacrifice, might be tempted to sin (Hebrews 10:26-27, 12:26-29, II Peter 3:10-11). The future benefit of the Lake of Fire will be a thorough scouring of all evil, perversion and filth from the universe, ushering in an eternity without the pain or misery of sin (Zephaniah 3: 14-15, Revelation 21: 8, 27). As God's called out ones, our time of judgment (our Great White Throne Judgment) begins right now (I Peter 4:17, II Peter 1:3-11)

From the Archives: Featured Article

[What Is the Second Death?](#)

by David C. Grabbe

The common belief among Christians—and other religions have similar depictions of the afterlife—is that one's immortal soul goes either to heaven or hell after death. David Grabbe argues that this ignores the biblical concept of the second death, an event beyond physical death that not only undermines the traditional heaven-hell and immortal soul doctrines, but also highlights God's perfect sense of justice.

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