

What is Conditional Immortality?

By David Burge

1. Only God is Immortal by Nature. Immortality is a Gift of God to Creatures.

The Bible affirms that God alone has immortality as a present possession (1Tim. 1:17 c.f. 6:16). The "glory of the immortal God" is contrasted with that of "mortal man" (Rom. 1:23). For humanity, immortality is still a prize to be sought after (Rom. 2:7). It will be granted only to "those who are considered worthy" (Luke 20:34-36), to the believer in Christ alone, and then only when Jesus returns (1Cor. 15:42-54).

2. A "Soul" is Something We Are, Not Something We Have.

Meanwhile, human beings are creatures of dust (Gen. 2:7 c.f. 3:19, 18:27; Psa. 103:14). We do not have souls, we are "living souls" (Gen. 2:7), as are the animals (Gen. 1:20, 21, 24, 30, 2:19).

3. Spirit is the Principle of Life Given to Both Humans and Animals by God.

The Spirit of God inbreathed is what gives life – the outgoing of the spirit returning to God who gave it, is death – for human and animal alike (Gen. 1:30, 6:17, 7:15, 22; Job 34:14-15; Psa. 104:29-30; Ecc. 3:18-21, 12:7).

4. In Death All of Us Dies, Not Just Part of Us.

People are buried, not bodies. Abraham was buried (Gen. 25:8,10), as were David (1King. 2:10), Stephen (Acts 8:2), even Jesus (John 19:42). The risen Christ told Mary, "I have not yet returned to the Father" (John 20:17). The committal of his spirit (Luke 23:46) was not his return to the Father. The spirit apart from the body is not the "real" you! At death the real you returns to the dust (Re-read Gen. 3:19!).

5. In Death There is No Consciousness.

In the state of death there is no remembering (Psa. 6:5); no praising (Psa. 6:5, 115:17, Isa. 38:18); no thinking (Psa. 146:4, Ecc. 9:4); no hoping (Ecc. 9:4, Isa. 38:18); only silence (Psa. 115:17). The dead, good and bad alike, are said to "sleep" (Dan. 12:1-2, 1 Thes. 4:13-18). Wicked Jeroboam slept with his fathers (1 King. 14:20), as did evil Ahab (1 King. 22:40). Faithful Job expected to "sleep in the dust" (Job 7:21). Jesus' friend Lazarus fell asleep (John 11:11) as did the martyr, Stephen (Acts 7:60).

6. The Only Hope of the Dead is Personal Resurrection to Life.

The Bible puts forward no hope other than that of resurrection. Isaiah says, "your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust; wake up and shout for joy." (Isa. 26:19). Daniel too makes this point: "many who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake ..." (Dan. 12:2). Paul too, puts forth the resurrection to eternal life as the only hope for the believer (1Cor. 15; 1 Thes. 4:13-18).

7. The Resurrection of the Unsaved Will be to Judgement and Destruction.

The wicked will be raised, judged and condemned (Dan. 12:2, John 5:29, Acts 24:15) to die a "second death" (Rev. 2:11, 20:14). They will "consume away"; they will "be cut off"; they will "perish"; "be burned up" and "be no more". They "will be ashes under the soles of your feet" (Mal. 4:1, 3). The "undying worm" and "unquenchable fire" consume their corpses (Isa. 66:24 c.f. Mark 9:48).

8. The New Order of Creation Will Contain No Remnant of Sin or Wickedness.

Ultimately, heaven and earth will be made new (Isa. 65:17, 66:22, Rom. 8:19-21, 2 Pet. 3:13, Rev. 21-22). "the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord" (Num. 14:21, Isa. 11:9, Hab. 2:14) and "God will be all in all." (1 Cor. 15:28). There will be no corner of this universe where sinners exist forever in rebellion against him!

Conclusion:

Conditional immortality takes Scripture at face value: life means life; death means death. This affects how we understand the atonement, sin and its penalty, human nature, death, resurrection, and life in immortality. **It puts the hope of the second coming and the Kingdom of God into proper perspective: at centre stage.** It makes judgment day, the climax of history. **It affirms the reality of "hell" without impugning God's character.** It affirms God's final victory over sin and evil. **"life only in Christ"** gives full honour to Christ as **"the Resurrection and the Life"** (John 11:25).



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