Lesson 17 - The State of the Dead



One of the questions that is uppermost in the minds of many is “What happens when one dies?” This is especially true if we have lost a loved one. Death is the “grim reaper,” and as such everyone of us has to face it. According to the Bible, all members of humanity are born slaves to the fear of death (see Hebrews 2:15). One main reason for this is that we do not know what our destiny is or what happens to us when we die.

The common belief is that the soul of the righteous goes to enjoy the bliss of heaven while that of the wicked goes to hell to burn forever. But is this what the Bible teaches? According to the most favorite text of Scripture, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish (die) but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

This eternal or everlasting life is God's supreme gift to mankind. Many pagan religions and especially Greek mythology teach that the soul of man is immortal. Unfortunately, this idea of an immortal soul was borrowed from the Greeks by the early Church Fathers and made a part of Christianity. However, it may surprise you that nowhere in the Bible is this idea found.

What then does the Bible teach about the soul and the state of man in death? Further, if man does not have an immortal soul where does one go after death? This lesson will answer these important questions.

1. What did man become after God breathed into him the breath of life? Genesis 2:7

The Hebrew word for “soul” (KJV) or “being” (NKJV) in this verse is nephesh. The primary meaning of the word nephesh is “the life principle.” That is why this same word is used to define the life of man as

well as of animals. For example, in Genesis 1:24 nephesh is translated "creature" to refer to animals. And nephesh is translated as "life," "lives" ("lifeblood" - NKJV) and again "life" in Genesis 9:4, 5.

2. What warning did God give Adam about eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Genesis 2:17

The word "die" means to say good-bye to life. The life or soul that God created in Adam was not naturally, but conditionally, immortal. As long as our first parents obeyed God, they were given the privilege to live forever. But the moment they sinned, their life came under the sentence of death.

3. Where did the idea of an immortal life or soul first come from? Genesis 3:4

The idea that sin does not deprive us of life came from Satan, the enemy of souls. That was his first lie, which he has perpetuated since the Fall.

4. What is (1) the wages of sin, and (2) God's gift to mankind in Christ? Romans 6:23

Please notice that "the wages of sin" is the opposite of "the gift of God." The former is good-bye to life forever while the latter is eternal life.

5. Who only has natural immortality? 1 Timothy 6:12-16

The "Who" is referring to Christ, the Son of God. Only God has natural immortality. But because God "so loved the world," He offers mankind the gift of immortality through His Son Jesus Christ.

6. What two things did Christ accomplish in His death and resurrection? 2 Timothy 1:10

7. What happens when we believe in God's Son, Jesus Christ? John 5:24

8. In whom only does a believer have eternal life? 1 John 5:11, 12

When we by faith receive Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, the gift of eternal life becomes ours. Apart from Christ, the only life we have is the mortal life we inherited from Adam. Because of sin, this life is condemned to eternal death.

9. For whom did God prepare the everlasting fire? Matthew 25:41

According to the clear teachings of the Bible, the word "everlasting fire" does not mean that the fire itself is everlasting but rather its effect is eternal. This fire is prepared only for the devil and his angels. By rejecting the gift of life in Christ, the lost have chosen to be eternally destroyed with Satan and his angels.

10. What example does Scripture give of this eternal or everlasting fire? Jude 7

Today Sodom and Gomorrah lie in ashes. The destruction of these two wicked cites by eternal fire has been recorded as a warning to mankind that all who turn their backs on God's gift of life in Christ will experience the same fate.

11. What happens to the soul that sins? Ezekiel 18:20

Here is a clear statement of Scripture, that if a soul sins, it will die. By the word "soul," the Bible means the total person. Then, the wages of sin is death or good-bye to life of the total person.

12. When a person dies, is he or she conscious of anything? Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6

In death all our thoughts and feelings end. The Bible is absolutely clear that a dead person is totally unconscious and is incapable of communicating with the living. Any other manifestation is from the devil.

13. What is accomplished when a person's faith in Christ is restored? James 5:19, 20

The death James is talking about is the eternal death that is the wages of sin. Again, the only hope of eternal life for anyone to experience is through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Apart from Him we must all face eternal death.

14. When will the believers experience immortality? 1 Corinthians 15:51-53

It is only at the Second Coming of Christ that believers will experience immortality as a tangible reality. This is the blessed hope of all believers.

15. How did Christ describe the death of Lazarus to His disciples? John 11:11-14

Jesus described the death of Lazarus as a sleep. The Bible describes this as the first death since everyone experiences this death. It is only at the Second Advent of Christ that believers will experience the joy of eternal life.

16. What claim did Jesus make to Martha, the sister of Lazarus? John 11:25

The blessed hope of a Christian is not realized at death but at the resurrection. Eternal life will only be experienced at the Second Coming of Christ.

17. What hope does the Bible give to those who have died in Christ? 1 Thessalonians 4:13, 14

Just as Jesus died, was buried, and rose again, so also will be the experience of all who have died in Christ. That is why as Christians we do not mourn over our dead, as unbelievers do who have no hope of the resurrection.

18. What is implied when a person denies the hope of the resurrection? 1 Corinthians 15:16

19. How does Paul describe the resurrection of Christ? 1 Corinthians 15:20

20. When will the resurrection of believers take place? 1 Corinthians 15:23

There were some in Corinth who did not believe in the resurrection (see 1 Corinthians 15:12). But Paul makes it very clear, in 1 Corinthians 15:13-19, that if we deny the resurrection of believers, we have to deny the resurrection of Christ. According to this passage, the hope of believers is not going to heaven at death but going at the resurrection which will take place at the Second Coming of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 15:51-54).

21. When did Jesus promise His disciples He would take them to heaven? John 14:3

Jesus promised to take His followers to heaven at His Second Coming, not at the time of death. This is the blessed hope (see Titus 2:11-13).

22. On whom does the second death have no power? Revelation 20:6

The Bible speaks of two resurrections, just as it does of two deaths. The first death is referred to as a sleep because it will be followed by a resurrection. The second death is the wages of sin, good-bye to life forever. This death the believers, who will rise first, will not experience (see John 5:28, 29).

23. Who will experience the second death? Revelation 20:14, 15

Those who have rejected the gift of salvation in Christ have refused to have their names recorded in the Book of Life. Consequently, they will have to join Satan and his angels in the lake of fire that will completely destroy the wicked (see Matthew 25:41-46). May this never become true of you.

Notes

My Response to Lesson 17

• According to Scripture, only God has immortality. But through the cross, He offers immortality to mankind. Believers will experience this gift at the Second Coming of Christ. Do you believe this?

Response: _____

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