

Conditional Immortality

By Burr Eggleston

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A short time ago, the writer heard a popular minister, of a popular denomination, speaking at a funeral service, say:

1st. "There is a need of immortality!"

2nd. "There is a desire for it!"

3rd. "There is evidence of present possession."

To the first we heartily agree that men need immortality. To his second statement we give full assent. But when he says there is evidence that men now possess immortality, we honestly demur.

We supposed this pastor of a big city church would bring Scriptures to prove his third premise, but not a single verse did he quote. Why? It must be for one of two reasons. Either he must have thought the idea was so universally accepted that no evidence was needed or else he did not have the evidence.

As we have gone in and out among the people as pastor and evangelist for years, we have found many who do not believe that men are naturally immortal. Experience, actual observation, reason, philosophy and revelation all fail to prove it.

It is reasonable to conclude, and so far as we know, it is not disputed, that immortality, if possessed by any, is possessed by all who are born into the world. As we turn the pages of Holy Writ, we fail to find the evidence that immortality is a present possession. Quite to the contrary, we find many Scriptures to bear testimony that immortality or eternal life will be bestowed upon those who meet certain definite Bible conditions, which we are sure may be summed up in the graphic language of the great apostle to the Gentiles in Romans 2:7, "To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life."

Together let us search the Scriptures as for hidden treasures. Our Lord has said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6). Followers of Mahomet, (one-fourth of the population of the earth) reject the Christ, as do many others of various religious sects and cults, throughout the world. As all have natural life in the above mentioned text. If these religionists already mentioned will not go to the Saviour for life and immortality, they will never receive these blessings. Immortality is conditional.

It is the general belief of the Orthodox Church that all, good and bad, have immortality as a present possession. If true this view involves more than its adherents will be willing to admit.

First, for the righteous, it means eternal life in happiness, independent of Christ. Secondly, for the unrighteous, misery and woe, uninterrupted throughout eternity. Or, thirdly, its adherents are forced to accept universal salvation, in order to harmonize that Scriptural statement, "God is love," with the longings and desires of the human heart.

The Redeemer said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me:

"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.

"My Father which gave them to Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand.

"I and My Father are one."

If immortality is a natural possession, then the death of Jesus was unnecessary, as He would die to bring men something they already possessed. Shall we so repudiate the wisdom of God? It is evident that a Bible teaching can be sustained by Bible language. If immortality is conditional, we shall find it plainly revealed in God's Book.

No less a personage than Shaler Matthews, Dean of Chicago University some 25 years ago, said: "The trend of theological thought it toward Universalism or Conditionalism with a dominant trend toward Conditionalism." Some of the bold champions of this great truth have been Wm. E. Gladstone of England, Dr. Charles Parkhurst of New York, Dr. J. Agar Beet, at one time at the head of the Wesleyan College, also a prolific writer on this subject. Dr. Lyman Abbott and Charles M. Sheldon have to some extent espoused this cause, together with Dr. John Cummins of the Scotch Church, and our beloved hymn writer, Horatius Bonar. Thus we find ourselves in good company when we accept this Bible truth.

As this tract is written for the common people, we will not enter into an extended discussion, but will let the Scriptures be our only defense. In Ezekiel 18:4 we read: "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the

soul that sinneth, it shall die.” Also a part of the 19th verse: “When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live.”

Romans 6:23 declares: “The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” I think I hear someone inquire, “If the wages of sin is death, when does the punishment begin?” We answer, not while the person is living, for “the wages of sin is death.” Not while the person is dying, for “the wages of sin is death.” The punishment begins when the person is dead. How long does the punishment continue? Just as long as the person is in the death state. And nowhere in His Word has God said that He would raise men from the second death. This makes Matthew 25:46 very clear. Having found that the punishment for disobeying God is death, Matthew 25:46 tells us the duration of that punishment. It is everlasting! This is reasonable, logical, Biblical, therefore true.

Searching the Word, we find that the word immortal occurs but once in the Book. This is in 1 Timothy 1:17 and refers to God only. “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.” Surely man cannot appropriate these attributes for his own. Looking on we see that the word immortality is found five times in the Bible. Let us ponder over these quotations briefly. In 1 Timothy 6:16, the Apostle is speaking of God. “Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.” After this declaration by the pen of inspiration, it does seem strange that puny man should claim immortality, when God alone possesses it. In 2 Timothy 1:10 we read of Jesus Christ who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. Or, by overcoming death and the grace, He has served notice on Satan the author of death (Hebrews 2:14) that the time is surely coming when the head of the serpent (Satan) will be bruised (Genesis 3:15).

This will result in Satan’s death. Then:

“The dream of prophets long foretold
Will be at last fulfilled,
While death gives up his sullen reign,
And vanquished, quits the field.”

Thus God’s saints will triumph forever.

In 1 Cor. 15 verses 53, 54, we are given a glimpse of Jehovah’s vast plan in eschatology or the last things. Here it is stated that, “this mortal must put on immortality.” This positive statement should be conclusive to every Spirit-led Child of God.

Inspiration’s solemn statement is that it is at the resurrection (not at birth or at death) that men are to receive immortality.

Paul in 1 Thess. 4:13, 18, makes it plain that with the coming of the Christ, and the sounding of the trumpet, will occur the resurrection of the dead, and the translation of God’s living saints. Romans 2:7 declares the conditions upon which immortality is to be obtained: “To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life.” The ungodly will receive just the opposite, “Tribulation and anguish,” and ultimately, death (Romans 6:23).

Even the oft quoted text, John 3:16, is a conditional text. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Here we are plainly told by the chief of teachers, that unless we believe on Jesus Christ, we shall perish. And in perfect harmony with the above text we read Psalm 145:20, “The Lord preserveth all them that love Him; but all the wicked will He destroy.” From the Scriptural citations given, it is very evident that immortality is conditional.

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