
Why I Believe in Conditional Immortality

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By Sidney A. Hatch

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Preface

The purpose of these remarks is to give a personal testimony as to why this writer believes in conditional immortality. An attempt has not been made to completely cover the subject of conditionalism. But it is hoped that in addition to being a witness the words written herein will prove to be a stimulus to further study

Certain portions of this testimony are, necessarily, autobiographical. Hence, an effort has been made to avoid mentioning names and places. The desire is, admittedly, to propagate, but not to "answer back" or reply to critics.

As the writer looks back over the last decade especially he can only thank and praise God for the way in which He has led.

Introduction

I placed my faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ when in high school. A godly pastor schooled us in the fundamentals of the faith. This included a confidence that at death a man's "soul" went either to heaven or to hell. (I was confident that mine would go to heaven because of the decision which I had made.) It also included a belief that all men would spend eternity alive either in heaven or in hell.

Upon graduation from university, I felt that God was calling me to the ministry. Training for this work was begun and then completed after military service during World War II. Graduation from theological seminary took place in 1948. The Lord made it possible, however, to obtain further schooling and in 1953 an advanced theological degree was secured. This, in turn, was followed by two years of resident graduate study in Hebrew. With the exception of university, all of this work was done in thoroughly evangelical schools.

Despite this training, however, my childhood concept of the nature and destiny of man remained practically unchanged. I still thought of man as a creature who possessed an "immortal soul" or "immortal spirit." This, supposedly, distinguished him from the other animals which did not possess an "immortal soul." Hence this soul, because it was immortal, had to be assigned to spend all time and eternity somewhere, and the choice was limited to the above-mentioned two places, heaven or hell!

Two things, however, occurred in seminary which later were to influence my thinking. One was a question asked by a student; the other was a realization of my desire to learn all the Hebrew possible while still in the classroom.

One day in a theology class one of the school's leading professors was asked if it were really necessary as ministers of the gospel to believe in the eternal hell-fire torment of the lost. I was surprised that the student would dare to ask such a question, and expected a firm, solid, scriptural answer squelching its heretical implications!

But the answer proved more surprising than the question. The gist of the professor's reply was that, admittedly, there were problems, and the traditional view did seem harsh, but, after all, it was the orthodox view and the most practical one to hold. Suffice to say I left the class with a seed of doubt in my heart; small, yes, but it was there just the same.

The study of Hebrew led to a determination upon graduation to prepare all Old Testament lessons and messages, so much as God enabled me, directly from the Hebrew Scriptures rather than from any English translation. At that time I was conducting a mid-week, verse-by-verse study in Genesis, and following this method of preparation. Needless to say, it did not take long to see that the Hebrew word for soul, *nephesh*, was used for all other living creatures as well as for man.

In connection with this the original text of Leviticus 17:11 had been studied. Here, along with Genesis 9:4, it is clearly stated that the soul or life of the flesh is in the blood. To be more explicit, Leviticus 17:14 makes it quite clear that the soul or life of all flesh is the blood thereof. Thus my view as to soul and the nature of man had collapsed. No longer could I believe and teach that man was an immortal soul living for the moment in a temple of clay, and that this separable soul could and would leave him at death. Help and new light upon the Scriptures were needed.

As has been well said, God is never too early, but neither is He ever too late. A new acquaintance handed me some literature published by the Conditional Immortality Mission of London, England. There I read of everlasting life only in Christ, sometimes called "conditional immortality." This presented a solution to the problems at hand which I found to be thoroughly scriptural.

Let it be said at this point that conditional immortality is a very simple and clear doctrine. It resorts to no difficult theological or philosophical gyrations. It is the belief that man may become immortal on one condition and that is that he believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. This immortality, or everlasting life, shall then be put on at the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the believers, not before.

On the negative side it is the belief, in the light of Scripture, that man does not possess any innate, inborn immortality of his own. Such can only be "the gift of God." This precious doctrine is sometimes simply called "life only in Christ."

The presentation of life only in Christ subsequently became a vital part of my ministry. Ultimately it led to several things: A change of pulpits, a change of denominations, a change of friends, and the misunderstanding of many people. Even for a time it meant a change of vocation.

But it also meant new light on the Word, a clearer grasp of the gospel, a greater appreciation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and a greater dependence on Him. It brought into my experience a new and increased fervor to preach this true gospel, as well as new friends, new fellowship, and a newly opened door of ministry. And, through it all, never for a moment did I doubt the truth of this glorious message; rather, faith and devotion to it became stronger.

With the circumstances associated with the discovery of this truth explained, the following sets forth the basis for my acceptance of conditional immortality as a teaching of the Word of God.

S. A. H.

Chapter One

Conditional Immortality Explains What Man Is

Conditional immortality does not attempt to speculate as to what man is. It does not attempt to read into the biblical account any more than what is there. It does not attempt to see or argue whether man is two parts, three parts, or any number of component parts. This precious doctrine takes Genesis 2:7 at face value. "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

What is man? The Word of God says he is a creature formed from the dust of the ground into which God breathed the breath of life. The result of this creative action is "a living soul" or "a living being." Not an "immortal soul"! Nowhere is this expression found in Scripture.

Nor does it say that God breathed into Adam a soul, whether immortal or not. The verse must be read carefully. God "breathed into his nostrils *the breath of life*; and man *became* a living soul."

But it may be suggested by some that "the breath of life" is an immortal soul or immortal spirit. Again we must insist on a careful reading of Scripture. This verse does not say such, nor does any verse of the Bible say that "breath of life" is an "immortal soul" or "immortal spirit," a separate and conscious entity in itself, apart from man's flesh.

The expression “breath of life” is in Hebrew “breath of lives.” The word life is plural in form. Hence, this writer has heard it taught that this plural form, “lives,” indicates that God put into man his components, such as body, soul, and spirit.

However, “lives” being plural proves nothing of the kind. Grammatically it is an abstract plural. But the reader does not need to find in grammar the solution to the problem. A quick check of “life” in Young’s *Analytical Concordance*, pages 603-604, will reveal that the plural, “lives,” is used in many passages, including that of the animals going into the ark two by two. “And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein is the breath of lives” (Genesis 7:15). Hence animals also possess this “breath of life” from God. One would hardly say that this proves that they are body, soul and spirit in the popular sense of these terms!

But a most revealing and helpful fact in my own personal study was to note that the Hebrew word for “soul,” which is *nephesh*, is used not only of man in Genesis 2:7 but also of all the other living creatures mentioned in Genesis, chapters one and two. So the waters swarm with “soul of life” or “living souls” (1:20), and God also created the sea monsters and all “the creeping living souls” with which the waters abound (1:21). So also did God say that the earth should bring forth “the living creature after his kind,” or more literally, “the soul of life after its kind.” This included all of the animals from the stately creatures of the forest to the reptiles and worms of the soil (1:24-25). The Creator calls them all “living souls.”

Genesis 1:30 and 2:19 provide excellent summaries of the above-mentioned fact. “And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life [*nephesh*], I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so” (1:30).

“And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature [soul of life, or living soul], that was the name thereof” (2:19).

It is for this reason that John Nelson Darby in his translation of the Bible consistently uses the word “soul” in these verses. We certainly are not to infer therefrom that these animals are “immortal souls.”

If it be argued from Genesis 2:7 that men possess immortality, the same argument would apply to the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, and the fish of the sea; for they too are “living souls” possessing “breath of lives”!

Although this writer does not know with certainty why they felt as they did, it should be mentioned that there are distinguished names which have encouraged a belief in animal immortality: Bishop Joseph Butler, John Wesley, Augustus Toplady, and Louis Agassiz. And, St. Francis of Assisi preached to the birds! (Cf. Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology*. Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1945. pp. 984-85). Certainly these men have as much justification in this as others have in reading human immortality into the Genesis account.

Conditional immortality, however, accepts the scriptural definition of man as a “living soul” or “living being,” but never as an “immortal soul” or “immortal being.” The latter condition shall come about only at the resurrection of the just.

Chapter Two

Conditional Immortality Explains Where Man Goes at Death

It has long been my conviction that the first four chapters of Genesis are the theological seed-plot of the Bible. Genesis 3:15 is an illustration of this. So in Genesis 3:19 we find a clear statement to the first man as to where he would go at death: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”

Conditional immortality chooses to believe this verse. It believes that here God spoke to Adam the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. It does not for a moment intimate that God told Adam only half the story, half the truth; for there can be no guile or deceit in the words of God!

There is nothing in this verse or in any of God’s dealings with Adam to suggest that he or any part of him would go anywhere but “unto the ground,” “unto dust.” There is nothing here to suggest that Adam would find himself after death, and much to his surprise, in some sort of spirit world.

The conditionalist believes that God has never abrogated this verse. He prefers to believe the Bible rather than *The Odyssey* of Homer as to the intermediate state between death and resurrection. (This writer has read both.)

Jacob, in his great moment of anguish, thinking Joseph to be dead, confirmed the truth of Genesis 3:19, when he cried, “I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning” (Genesis 37:35). (The King James translators have here correctly rendered *sheol* as “the grave.”) In such an hour of heartbreak, of crushing sorrow and grief, when the human heart is laid bare, the great patriarch held on to no Babylonian or Egyptian hope of life after death, of life in a spirit world.

And so this condition—to be in the grace, in the dust of the earth—is often spoken of in the Scriptures as “sleep.” Thus the Lord spoke candidly when He said to David, “When thy days be fulfilled... thou shalt sleep with they fathers” (2 Samuel 7:12). And we may believe that the Scripture was fulfilled when it says, “David slept with his fathers” (1 Kings 2:10; Cf. Acts 13:36).

Daniel writes “of them that sleep in the dust of the earth” (Daniel 12:2). There is nothing vague or obscure in this statement. Language could not be more definite. There is not the slightest hint nor the remotest allusion to the dead being anywhere else. Such clear and unmistakable wording cannot be dismissed as only the language of appearance.

Matthew writes of “the saints which slept” (27:52). Our Lord speaks of the little maid sleeping (Matthew 9:24; Mark 6:39; Luke 8:52). Of Lazarus He said, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth” (John 11:11). When the disciples failed to understand His meaning John tells us, “Then said Jesus unto them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead’” (John 11:14).

Luke tells us that the martyr Stephen “fell asleep” (Acts 7:60). Paul gives great comfort—the coming of the Lord and resurrection from the dead—“concerning them when are asleep” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15). And finally in Peter’s Second Epistle we read that, “the fathers fell asleep.” In no case are we told that they went anywhere else except “to sleep.”

Finally it should be noted that our Lord said, “The hour is coming, in the which all that are *in the graves* shall hear his voice” (John 5:28). It is *in the graves*, not somewhere else, that His voice is heard.

Doubtless some will immediately think of the account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. A careful reading of both Luke 15 and 16 will show that this in one of several parables given there. To demonstrate its parabolic nature the rather facetious question might be asked, “Where was Abraham’s bosom before Abraham?” Or, “Do souls in torment have tongues that taste water?”

The Scripture had already declared, “In death there is no remembrance of thee” (Psalm 6:5), and also, regarding man, “His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish” (Psalm 146:4). But the Pharisees made void the Word of God by believing that dead men could communicate with one another. The Lord thus shows them that even if one rose from the dead they would not believe. This was proven by the desire to put to death the real Lazarus of Bethany for “by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus” (John 12:11). The events of Matthew 28:11-15 also demonstrate the attempt to suppress the fact of the resurrection.

Others of our readers may cite our Lord’s reply to the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43). But His words must be interpreted in the light of the thief’s request, to be remembered by the Lord whenever He comes into His kingdom. This can only be when Christ returns to establish His kingdom. Hence Christ tells the thief that he shall be with Him in paradise to be established in the next age, not at death. It should be considered that our Lord did not leave this earth to go anywhere until forty-three days after His crucifixion.

Still others may cite 2 Corinthians 5:8 where Paul says, “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” This expression, “to be present with the Lord,” or to be “at home” or “living” with Him, can only be realized when Jesus comes. This is indicated by the context. Verse one says that we have a body which is “*eternal* in the heavens.” Therefore Paul cannot be speaking here of a temporary body or state, to be put on at death and to last only until resurrection.

Furthermore, in verse four Paul speaks of “the mortal” being swallowed up by “the life” (compare the Greek here). This can only refer to mortal man, dust, being invested with “the life,” immortal resurrection life, at the coming of the Lord, when “this mortal shall have put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:54). Mortality cannot be swallowed up by the resurrection life before the resurrection.

Finally note that in the same context Paul tells us that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (verse 10). This occurs not at death but at the coming of the Lord.

A last redoubt of many brethren may be Philippians 1:23, “Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.” The Greek verb translated “depart” here is *analuō*. Its only other occurrence is in Luke 12:36 where it is translated “return.” “And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when he will *return* from the wedding.”

It is fair to ask, “Why is it not so translated in Philippians?” The reader familiar with Greek will note that a more literal rendering would be, “Having the desire for the return.” Certainly the return of the Lord from heaven is “far better.”

The noun form of this same word is *analysis*. Its proper meaning is to loose or to dissolve. From it comes our English word “analysis” which means, basically, the separation or anything into its parts or elements. *Analysis* occurs once in Scripture, 2 Timothy 4:6, “The time of my *departure* is at hand.” We would certainly come closer to the sense of Paul’s statement if we rendered it, “The time of my *analysis* is at hand,” that is, the dissolution of his body! The translation “departure” is surely acceptable, however, if we see in it “departure” from life and a “return” to that place of which God told Adam in Genesis 3:19. We are confident that Paul, in his final hour, did not abandon that glorious hope of resurrection, outlined to the Thessalonians and the Corinthians, for the Platonic idea of departure to a spirit world.

It has been the observation of this writer that all those arguments which contend that man goes somewhere else at death besides the grave are based on the assumption that there exists such a thing as “an immortal human soul.” For this supposition there is not one verse of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation.

Conditional immortality, therefore, accepts the scriptural teaching that at death a man returns to the ground out of which he was taken, and that he sleeps there until the resurrection.

Chapter Three

Conditional Immortality Explains What the Gospel Is

Conditional immortality clarified the gospel; it does not complete it. Again it takes scriptural language in its simplest sense. Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Here death means death, and life means life. But in the popular way of presenting this verse, death is said to mean life somewhere in time or space in *separation* from God. And life is said to mean a life in the *presence* of God.

But the issue in Romans 6:23 is no life in one place or life in another place. The issue is life or death, the complete possession of life or the complete absence of life. The definition that eternal death is a form of eternal life in separation from God is not in the Bible!

Conditional immortality takes John 3:16 at face value. The issue therein is “perish” or “everlasting life.” Again conditional immortality believes that perish means the utter loss and destruction of any form of life, hence death. Shall we read into this word some pagan notion of life in a spirit world of the damned? The Greek word here is *apollumi*, which means to kill, or to destroy, or to utterly destroy. It has secondary meanings, of course, and this writer is aware of them. But why destroy the splendid simplicity of the gospel by imposing here upon the word some secondary meaning?

It should be mentioned that Hebrews 1:11 speaks of the heavens and the earth perishing and uses this same Greek word. Are we to think that the heavens and the earth are to be kept somewhere and tortured forever?

Hence, according to conditional immortality the gospel is very simple: Life or death. To say that it is life in one place or eternity in another place is to reduce “the good news” to little more than the offer of an opportunity to live in the comforts of the new heavens and the new earth rather than in the wretched conditions of the traditional hell.

Furthermore, to say that the issue before men is life in one place or eternity in another location is to deny the claim of the Lord Jesus that He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25), for every man would already have life that is unending. In short, it is to succumb to the Satanic lies, first uttered in Eden, that men do not really die and that they may be “as gods” (Genesis 3:4-5).

I therefore also believe in conditional immortality because it preserves the clear-cut gospel issue from Genesis to Revelation. For example, if eternal torment, not death, is the penalty of sin, then the great promise of Genesis 3:15 should read, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall torture forever thy head, and thou shalt torture forever his heel.”

If eternal torment, not death, is the penalty for sin, many types, illustrations, and parables would have to be changed. The sacrificial animals of the Old Testament should never have been slain and burned; rather they should have been kept alive, caged up, and subjected to some kind of unending torment, perhaps burnings. David should never have slain Goliath and cut off his head. He should have brought him back alive, imprisoned him somewhere, and tortured him indefinitely. In the parables of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30), the tares should not have been bound in bundles to be burned up; they should simply have been bound!

If the penalty for sin is eternal torment, not death, then who has paid that penalty? Who has suffered unending, everlasting torture or torment for our sins? The Word of God says, “Christ *died* for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6), “Christ *died* for us” (Romans 6:8), “Christ *died* for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3), and, “that he by the grace of God should taste *death* [not eternal torment] for every man” (Hebrews 2:9).

Furthermore, the Scriptures says, Christ both died and rose” (Romans 14:9), and “Jesus died and rose again” (1 Thessalonians 4:14). Only evasive theological sophistry will attempt to say that death, cruel as it was, and the three days and three nights *in the grave*, were the equivalent of eternal torment. It may also be pointed out that Christ was not, according to the Word, in the flame of hell-fire during those three days of death. He was in the grave (*Cf.* Matthew 12:40 and 28:6).

Thus we see that conditional immortality preserves the sharply defined, concise issue of the gospel and of the ages, life or death. It also avoids the unscriptural extremes of universal or final reconciliation on the left and eternal torment on

the right. Life is life and death is death. And, it should be added, everlasting punishment remains punishment, not everlasting punishing.

Chapter Four

Conditional Immortality Explains What God Is

Conditional immortality rejoices in the truth of 1 John 4:8, "God is love." The man who accepts the plain biblical statement that the end of the wicked is "destruction" (Philippians 3:19) is not faced with the ever-present question, "How can a God of love maintain a chamber of horrors somewhere in the universe throughout eternity?"

What would we think of a parent who punished his child by holding even the tip of its finger in searing flame for a few minutes or a few seconds? Such an individual would certainly be regarded as bestial and demented. Nevertheless we are asked to believe that the Scriptures teach that God will thus torture "immortal human souls" for all time and eternity.

Yet the Christian who believes in conditional immortality also believes that God is just and righteous. He rejoices in "just and right is He" (Deuteronomy 32:4). He believes in "the righteous judgment of God" (Romans 2:2). He sees that the justice of God requires the punishment of sin.

Recognizing that there are in God the two attributes of love and justice the conditionalist notes first that "Herein is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). He is aware that "the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).

But he is also aware that those who "obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ... shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). Hence the wicked are destroyed with an everlasting destruction, or they are destroyed once and for all forever. "Everlasting destruction" does not mean "everlasting torment" for then nothing is destroyed; it is simply preserved, kept alive, in torment. Let destruction mean destruction is the plea of the conditionalist.

It should be said that this position has God vindicating His holiness and His perfect law, but it in no way makes Him vindictive. In short, our heavenly Father is a just judge (Psalm 7:9-12; 1 Peter 1:16), but He is neither a monster nor a fiend.

While discussing this point that conditional immortality accepts what the Bible says as to the nature of God, there is one other often-heard argument that should be considered. This writer has frequently been told, orally and in writing, that by believing in the destruction of the wicked he is aligning himself with many and various cults, which are then named.

Now the evangelical Christian who brings this charge against the conditionalist is forgetting that the issue is not what any group believes, but what the Word of God says. He immediately reveals in himself a party spirit and a reluctance to put the Word of God ahead of the word of man.

He also forgets that it is still true that people who live in glass houses should not throw stones. For example, the Christian who persists in clinging to the eternal torment theory is aligning himself with the Mohammedan Koran. The reader need only go to a bookstore or library, secure a copy of the Koran, and glance through it, to see the correctness of this fact.

He might note the second surah, or chapter, where it is said that those who misbelieve are fellows of the fire and shall dwell therein forever (*The Koran*, translated by E. H. Palmer, [Vol. 328, *The World's Classics*. London: Oxford University Press, 1953], pp. 5, 10, 20). He should note the close of chapter 44 where the Koran says that the sinful shall be haled into the midst of hell and the torment of hot water poured over his head (*Ibid.*, p. 429).

He should consider chapter 47, which speaks of the wicked not only dwelling in the fire forever but also being given boiling water to drink that shall rend their bowels asunder (*Ibid.*, p. 438). Finally, he may observe chapter 111, a very brief chapter, where the Koran describes the fate of Abu Laheb who, the footnote informs us, was an uncle of Mohammed and a bitter opponent of Islam. Here we read that Uncle Abu Laheb shall broil in a fire that flames, with his wife carrying faggots (*Ibid.*, p. 537)!

Such may be a part of the Koran but it is not a part of the old original gospel of John 3:16!

Finally, let the evangelical Christian consider that if he persists in his eternal torment theory he must also, of necessity, include in his thinking the unscriptural idea of the immortality of the soul. In this way he opens the door to all sorts of vagaries such as the invocation of saints, prayers for the dead, purgatorial theories, reincarnation, transmigration of souls, spiritism, and universal reconciliation. The foundation of all is the word of the serpent, "Ye shall not surely die" (Genesis 3:4).

Let it be recognized once and for all that conditional immortality is the true message that proclaims both the love of God and the judgment of God, without compromising either.

Chapter Five

Conditional Immortality Explains Why Christ Must Return

The scriptural position of conditional immortality recognizes the biblical truth that the only hope of the world is the Second Coming of Christ. This is because His return brings about the resurrection of the saints of the ages and the establishment of His kingdom upon the earth.

Paul tells us that at the resurrection we shall put on immortality, not before (1 Corinthians 15:49-55). Hence Christ must return to raise His won in order that they many rule and reign with Him.

If at death the righteous go immediately into His presence and immediately to their reward, then what need is there for the return of Christ and the resurrection of His people? It is no wonder that the preaching of these great doctrines became passé in some areas for many years.

The Second Coming of our Lord culminates in the judgment of the wicked dead, the lost. However, if at death they have already gone to the traditional hell, then what need is there later of a great judgment day? It would become hardly more than an empty procedure, for judgment would actually have been imposed at death.

The Scripture, however, speaks of judgment as occurring at a particular time in the future, not at death. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but *after this* the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). So our Lord spoke of "the resurrection of damnation (judgment)" (John 5:29). The scriptural order is death, resurrection, then judgment—not death, partial judgment, resurrection, then more judgment!

It may be argued that the sentence imposed in the day of judgment only increases and renders permanent the punishment entered into at death. But this still violates the scriptural principle, "Once to die, but after this the judgment," and "*resurrection* unto judgment." Furthermore, this would have a sentence being executed long before the case had entered the divine court.

Finally to have a sentence imposed at the moment of death is to deprive the Son of Man of His particular prerogative for a time to come. "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." "And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man" (John 5:22, 27).

The problem belongs to the adherent of eternal torment. He has on his hands "disembodied immortal souls" which must be consigned somewhere until a future day. Where to put them and what to do with them is for him a perplexing question requiring a solution. The conditionalist, however, is content to let men sleep until their resurrection, being aware that "the judgment to come" (Acts 24:25) shall satisfy the demands of divine justice (compare Romans 2:3-8).

Conditional immortality, therefore, recognizes the absolute necessity of the return of Christ. Without it there can be no resurrection, no immortality, no judgment, and no kingdom of God upon the earth. In its faith and message these truths retain their proper place.

Conclusion

I, therefore, believe in conditional immortality because it enables one to say, "Thus saith the Lord." It explains what man is, it explains where man goes at death, it explains what the gospel is, it explains what God is, and finally, it explains why Christ must come back. In other words, conditional immortality accepts the simple scriptural definition of these matters, nothing more. It does not embellish them with the ornaments of tradition or philosophy.

It is the conviction of this writer that conditional immortality has been the hope of saints of the ages. The coming of the Redeemer and the resurrection of the dead was certainly the hope of Job (19:25-26). Joseph gave instructions concerning his bones, not his "immortal soul," and this despite the years in Egypt (Genesis 50:25)!

Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians (Acts 7:22), but rejected it for the hope of God's people (Hebrews 11:24-26). David said, "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psalm 17:15).

Isaiah sang this song, "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust..." (26:19). Ezekiel prophesied, "Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel" (37:12). Daniel wrote that, "many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to everlasting contempt" (12:2). Such was also the hope of Martha (John 11:24), of John (1 John 3:2), of Paul (1 Corinthians 15:51-54), and of Peter (2 Peter 3:4-7).

Since the days of the apostles other saints of God have held fervently to a simple and pure hope: The sleep of the dead, Christ's return, and the resurrection of His people. A. J. Mills, in his work, *Earlier Life-Truth Exponents* (London: Elliot Stock, 1925), pages 2-15, mentions various groups that have held conditionalist views: Early Arabian Christians of the third century, whose views persisted in south west India until the arrival of the Portuguese about 1500; the Lollards, followers of John Wycliffe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; the Anabaptists of Reformation days; and Flemish Baptist who fled to England in the sixteenth century. Two of the latter, Hendrik Terwoort and Jan Pieters, were burned at the stake, July 22, 1575, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth (*Ibid.*, pp. 13-15).

J. H. Pettingell, in his book, *The Unspeakable Gift* (Malvern and London: "The Faith" Press, 1898), pages 260-92, cites as conditionalists such distinguished names as William Tyndale, Lyman Abbott, John Locke, Richard Francis Weymouth, Archbishop Whately, and Edward White. And so also was the great poet, John Milton, a believer in the sleep of the dead during the intermediate state (Cf. Augustus Hopkins Strong, *The Great Poets and Their Theology*. Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1897. pp 266-67. Mills, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34).

The name William Whiston (1667-1752) is familiar to many for it was he who translated the complete works of Josephus. He was a mathematician, writer, preacher, and deputy to Sir Isaac Newton at Cambridge, whom he later succeeded (Cf. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, article "William Whiston"). But it is little known that in his works he vigorously opposed the teaching of eternal torment, pointing out that the wicked, like chaff, will be entirely burned up, utterly consumed, rather than preserved and subjected to never-ending pains (Mills, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-41).

Today the voice and pen of Oscar Cullman, theological professor at the University of Basel and the Sorbonne in Paris stand on the side of conditionalism. In his book, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1958) he points out that the answer of the New Testament is clear; the true Christian hope is the resurrection of the dead, not the immortality of the soul.

The late William Temple (1882-1944), Archbishop of Canterbury, spoke out in favor of conditional immortality and against the endless torment of the lost (Bernard L. Bateson, "Archbishop Temple and Conditional Immortality," *Words of Life*, The Organ of the Conditional Immortality Mission, February, 1959, pp. 28-32). So also has Professor Norman H. Snaith of Leeds University, a name familiar to many seminarians and theologians. He has written that the immortality of the soul is not a Christian doctrine, that it comes from Plato, and that he finds no suggestion of it in the Bible. Then, in the same article, he has written that God holds out to mortal man the hope and promise of immortality, of a life in Christ, and that this is a free gift to every repentant sinner who comes in faith (Norman H. Snaith, "Easter and Spring," *Words of Life*, June, 1960, pp. 136-138. With acknowledgment to *Church of England New Life Monthly*). Many other prominent names might be mentioned and are indeed mentioned and quoted in a recent and learned work, *Modern Discussions of Man's Immortality* by Moses C. Crouse (Concord, N.H.: Advent Christian Publications, 1960).

But as we close, we again remind ourselves that what men outside the canon of Scripture have believed or written is not the final determinant of truth. We thank God for their testimony, and we pray for more like them. We are well aware that the truth of God's Word has never been reached by majority vote. If the words written here serve no other purpose than to incite the reader to search the Scripture, then they have achieved a measure of true success.

To a world steeped in Platonic tradition, the plea of the man who believes in conditional immortality, or life only in Christ, is the plea of the Apostle Paul as he stood before Agrippa, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" (Acts 26:8).

About the Author

Sidney A. Hatch was born at Glendale, Arizona. His parents later moved to La Puente, California, where his father conducted a citrus ranch.

He received his A.B. degree from the University of California at Los Angeles in 1940. During the years 1942-46 he served as sergeant in the 86th Infantry Division which saw action in Europe and the Philippines. Following this he studied in the California Baptist Theological Seminary and received the degree of B.D. in 1948. Graduate study continued at Dallas Theological Seminary where he received the Th.M degree in 1953. In the two years following he studied Semitics

at Dallas Seminary, which completed the residence work for a Th.D. Studies continued at the University of Southern California.

Ordained into the Baptist ministry, Mr. Hatch served several churches in California and Texas. A conviction of the biblical basis for conditional immortality led Mr. Hatch in 1961 to accept a call to the pulpit of the First Advent Christian Church of Portland, Oregon.

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