

WHAT IS MAN?

How can you prove what happens to man at death? Does man inherently have eternal life abiding in him? Here revealed is the plain truth about the so-called "immortal soul" doctrine.

by Herbert W. Armstrong

Man knows what other things are—the things around him—but he knows very little about himself.

Almost nobody knows what man is! Man devotes himself, it seems, to learning about almost everything except himself. And so we find this world today steeped in various and contradicting beliefs derived from fallible human reasoning.

The Common Assumption. The ancient pagans taught (and it has continued to be taught for many, many centuries) that man is a spiritual being—that he really is an "immortal soul" composed of spirit. The pagans further taught that this immortal soul is housed in what you might call a house of flesh—that the human body is merely the house we dwell in, or the cloak we put around us temporarily—and that the real you is not the body, but an immortal invisible soul—and yet a soul that knows, that thinks, that hears, that sees, and that will live on *consciously* forever.

Then, the theory goes on, that at death, the soul leaves the body, goes to a heaven, or a hell, or a purgatory, or a "happy hunting ground." Still others believe in the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, that you, yourself, after death will become, perhaps, a butterfly, a mosquito, a fly or perhaps something in the plant kingdom.

You will find that one religion believes one thing and another believes something altogether different. Even in the Western world of professing Christianity, one denomination believes one thing, and another sect "holds to" something altogether different.

And since these various religions are combinations of various beliefs stitched together—each one in a different way—can any of them be right?

Unless there is a Supreme Creator God and unless there is some divine Revelation from that God revealing the truth in all of its purity, then you have no basis at all for any knowledge or belief as to what man really is.

Unless you believe what is found in the Holy Bible, then you have no reliable source of belief whatsoever. It's the Bible, then—or nothing.

And the Bible does *not* reveal anything about an "immortal soul" that resides in a body of flesh, though many men have tried to read such a meaning into it.

What, then, is the real truth of the matter?

Science Reveals Part of the Secret. First, consider the proofs of science and then, secondly, the truth of Scripture.

Science deals with the material universe, with only matter or material substance. Science knows of no life apart from matter. No scientific authority believes that life in plants or animals is a separate entity which may exist apart from, or outside of the matter of a flower, a plant, or an animal. Science has demonstrated that all living substance arises *only* from other substance already living. The Law of Biogenesis proves that life comes only from life. When life ceases, nothing is left but dead matter. Nothing is more certainly proved by science than the utter impossibility of the appearance of life in a resurrection through any powers inherent in that dead matter.

There is the reproductive process—reproduction in plants, in animals and in humans. But there is no way to extend the life of a particular individual. Nothing inherent within the individual can bring life back after death, or any resurrection of life in any manner whatsoever, that is inherent within the plant, the animal, or the human being. All living matter, then, is mortal matter with a temporary existence. Flesh is matter, and man is flesh.

What about this doctrine, then, of the immortality of the soul? Science has *never* found a soul within any man.

There is no way that science can observe the nonphysical. There are no scientific evidences whatsoever of an "immortal soul" which leaves the body at death—that is, something that can think, see, hear, taste, smell, and reason apart from the human body.

Secondly, what does the Bible actually say?

What the Bible Reveals. Jesus Christ, the very Son of the Living God, is quoted as saying under inspiration: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh [that's what it is]. And that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Jesus said that man is born of the flesh. That's what man is. And then again, "Except a man be born" of the Holy Spirit of God, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:5-6).

Jesus Christ taught that man *can* enter into the very family—the Kingdom—of God, but he must be born over again. He has been born once, and he is now flesh. But he must be born again as a spirit being—this

time, born of God. Then *he shall become spirit!*

That's what Jesus Christ was saying in John 3:6-8. Man is flesh, *not* spirit. Man is not a spiritual entity, but a fleshly being, purely and simply.

In Genesis 3:19 God said to Adam: "For dust *thou* art." He said this to the man. He continued: "In the sweat of thy face shalt *thou* eat bread, till *thou* return unto the ground; for out of it wast *thou* taken." This is *not* just talking about the man's body. God had said, "For dust *thou* art, and unto dust shalt *thou* return." The "thou" was the conscious man to whom He was speaking.

Man is a Soul. In Genesis 2:7, we read this: "And the Eternal God formed man of the dust of the ground." Out of what substance was man made? Man was formed "of the dust of the ground"—*not* out of spirit.

Next, God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (air that goes in and out of the nostrils) and "man became a living soul." It does *not* say that God put an "immortal soul" inside of him. God put the breath of life into him—that is, air, or wind—and man became a living soul. So man *is* a soul, he does not *have* a soul.

Notice Psalms 146:3-4: "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. *His breath* goeth forth, he returneth to his earth." Note that. It doesn't just say "his body." It is *he* that returns to the earth—"in that very day his thoughts perish." He ceases to think! His thoughts perish.

What God gave at creation is the breath. God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life. But that breath *leaves him* at death. Dust he is, and to dust he returns.

Now consider Psalm 104:29: "Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust." The breath then is what God gave. It goes forth at death. God takes away the breath when the person dies. He returns to dust, and simply becomes dust again.

Next consider Ecclesiastes 3:19: "For that which befalleth the sons of men [human beings] befalleth beasts [God is speaking of men and ani-

mals]; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath." The same breath in the nostrils of animals is also in the nostrils of every human being.

Continuing: "So that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place [both man and beasts] all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." That's man and animal alike.

The Bible absolutely *refutes* the idea of the immortality of the soul. What God gave at birth is the breath of life. He breathed into the nostrils of animals and man alike—the breath of life. It leaves them when they die. Then they return to dust.

What is the Life of Man? The life of mortal man is in his breath. But what is the function of the breath?

First the breath goes into the lungs. Simultaneously the blood flows through the lungs on the way back to the heart and is pumped through the arteries and the veins. The oxygen from the air oxidizes the blood. It then becomes created energy that keeps up the body, giving a person life-producing energy.

The life is in the blood, and the blood needs the breath of life to keep it active and alive.

In Genesis 9:4 we read this: "But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat." Man is flesh and blood. His life is in the blood—oxidized by the breath of life—*not* by an immortal soul.

Who Has Immortality? Many twist the biblical passages about death to apply to the body, clinging to their fallacious idea of an "immortal soul." There are no such words in the Bible as "immortal soul." The word "immortal" occurs only once in the King James Bible. That's in I Timothy 1:17. There it refers to Christ as the King who has been made immortal, and, who is now very God.

In the English language, the word *immortality* occurs five times in the King James Bible. *First*, only God has it, not man. You'll find that in I Timothy 6:16. *Secondly*, Christ brought immortality to light through the gospel so that man can *put it on in a resurrection* (II Tim. 1:10).

We are also told that we must seek for it. You don't seek for what you already have. It's something we don't

naturally possess. It is the gift of God! (Rom. 2:7).

The 4th and 5th places are found in I Corinthians 15:50-54. The righteous—those who have salvation—are changed from mortal to immortal. They come under God's grace and put on immortality at the resurrection of the dead—and *not* before!

Did Adam Have Immortality? Was man created immortal in the very beginning? Notice Genesis 3:22. This is the story of our first parents. It reads: "And the Eternal God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil." This is *after* the man had disobeyed God, the Supreme Ruler.

God had commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:16-17). The Man was mortal, or he would *not* have been able to die.

Then along came the devil in the guise of a serpent. He beguiled the woman into reaching out and taking the forbidden fruit and in effect stealing what was not hers. This was idolatry. It amounted to rebellion, disobedience and dishonoring her only parent. She then gave the fruit to her husband, and he ate it willingly and knowingly.

Then God said: "... Man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life [that is, partake of immortal life], and eat, and live forever [*lest* he live forever!]: therefore the Eternal God sent him forth from the garden of Eden to till the ground from whence he was taken." So God drove out the man from all access to immortality. "And he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life" (Gen. 3:22-24). Why? *Lest man go back and gain eternal life.*

You can see very plainly from the account in Genesis that man had no immortality and no "immortal soul" either!

"No Immortal Soul!" The Hebrew word for soul is *nephesh*. In Genesis *nephesh* applies three times to fish,

fowl, and creeping things *before* it is used to apply to man. In other words, *animals are souls*, the same as men. They are *not* immortal.

Notice Ezekiel 18:4: "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.*" The soul that sins—or disobeys the laws that God Almighty gave in His great love for us—the soul which does that shall die!

So a soul is mortal.

This truth is repeated in the 20th verse. Twice your Bible says that the soul is mortal! *It shall die!*

Now notice I John 3:15: "Who-soever hateth his brother is a murderer." In time of war there are millions upon millions of soldiers who hate their enemies (in reality their brothers) across the battle lines, and most of the people back home supporting them learn to do the very same thing.

John continues: "And ye know that *no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.*" A man that hates his brother is certainly composed of flesh and blood, and John says that he does *not* have eternal life within him. *But if he had an "immortal soul,"* he would have eternal life abiding in him.

That is why God had said: "In the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die." God meant that the man was mortal. So man merely has a temporary existence, and *no hope of future life inherent within himself.*

God does give him that hope as His gift, but man does *not* possess it apart from God.

The Spirit in Man. At this point it is well that we come to understand another basic truth about man—a truth to which even the minds of theologians have been blinded.

Early in my intensive study of the evolution vs. special creation question, I learned what man is! But I had not researched deeply the question of the difference between animal brain and human mind until early in the decade of the sixties. And then, at last, I found plainly revealed what causes this tremendous difference.

In Job 32:8, we read: "But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding."

Notice it carefully. The inspiration

of God gives—imparts to man—understanding. But how? By what means? The means is contained in that same verse: "There is a spirit in man." And spirit is nonphysical. Notice carefully, this spirit is *IN* man. It is not the man, but something that is *IN* man.

And what is man? Of what is he composed? The man is composed of *matter*, not spirit! Remember, as quoted previously, "The Eternal God formed man of the dust of the ground." Dust is material substance. Man is physical. Man's brain is physical. The human brain is almost precisely like the brain of whale, elephant, dolphin, chimp. But the spirit *IN* man is nonphysical. It is a nonphysical component *IN* man *that is not present in animal brain.*

Spirit Imparts Intellect to Physical Brain. Now notice the function of the "spirit in man."

In his first letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul is explaining why the world's great intellects—even though they all possess the "spirit in man"—cannot comprehend the knowledge of what God has in store for man. He goes to great length to explain that it is not because of big words or complicated language that they are unable to understand spiritual things. On the contrary, he explains that he used only plain, simple speech to explain God's plan.

In other words, in order to understand the things of God, one must—in addition to the "spirit in man" with which we are all born—receive God's Holy Spirit.

In I Corinthians, chapter 1, the apostle Paul shows it is not the great intellects that are able to comprehend spiritual knowledge—but on the contrary the more common and simple among humans have been called and *given* this comprehension.

He writes: "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the . . . weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen . . . that no flesh should glory in his presence . . . And I, brethren,

when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God" (I Cor. 1:26-29, 2:1).

In other words this spiritual knowledge is *revealed* from God, and is not obtained *because* of a superior degree of human intellect. The apostle is showing that even the humble may comprehend. He writes that "your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. . . . But we speak the wisdom of God . . . even the hidden wisdom . . . which none of the princes of this world knew . . ." (verses 5-8).

The only way knowledge can enter the human mind, naturally, is through the eye, the ear, or the senses of taste, smell, or touch. Paul goes on to show that this spiritual knowledge from God simply cannot enter the normal, natural mind—no matter how superior the intellect.

"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (verse 9).

"But God hath *revealed* them unto us by his Spirit . . ." (verse 10), regardless of the degree of human intellect. In other words, this knowledge of spiritual things does not enter human minds by natural processes—for spirit cannot be seen, heard, smelled, felt nor tasted—and there is no other way knowledge enters the mind naturally. The great minds of the world, without God's Spirit, are confined to knowledge of the physical. That's why, when a converted person—perhaps of lesser intellectual attainments—speaks of spiritual things, it appears as utter foolishness to the highly educated mind. All his knowledge is confined to physical things. Spiritual things are on a totally different plane.

The Mystery Explained. Now we come to the verse that explains it all! The verse that has been misapplied by those who have accepted the "immortal soul" fallacy.

"For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God" (verse 11).

Study that—in context! What man knows—has knowledge of—the things of a man—what man could

have this human knowledge—knowledge animal brain cannot receive—save by the *spirit of man* which is in him?

Animals do not have this spirit—this nonphysical component. Animal brain therefore cannot perform as does human mind. And human brain alone, just barely superior to animal brain, could not have and utilize this human knowledge unless there was added to the physical brain this *spirit*—this nonphysical component that is given to man. And this spirit, *associated and functioning with* human brain, produces the intellect that is awesome compared to animals.

Keep carefully in mind that man is *wholly* composed of matter—from the dust of the ground. But God has *added* to man something that is *not* the man but something *in* him. And this nonphysical something—this *spirit*—imparts the power of intellect to physical human brain.

How to Gain Immortality. But if man is not an “immortal soul” what hope do we have for life after death? Let it be said here that it is an enormously greater hope than the “immortal soul” fallacy. We find this great hope in the resurrection chapter. “Now this I say . . . that flesh and blood [mortal man] *cannot* inherit the kingdom of God” (I Cor. 15:50). Jesus Christ talked about being born into the Kingdom of God. He said in effect: “You can’t enter that Kingdom as long as you are

mortal flesh” (John 3:3-8). Flesh and blood—that’s what we are—cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.

We can only be an heir to eternal life *now* in this life. The chapter continues: “Neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be *changed*, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” The apostle Paul is speaking here of a resurrection from the dead, as well as an instantaneous changing of those who are alive at that time. Continue: “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must put on* immortality.”

So you don’t have immortality now! That is the teaching of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation! That is why we must be born again by a resurrection from the dead.

There is life after death. But that life *lies in a future resurrection—not* in an “immortal soul.” It lies in a new birth *as an immortal spirit being in the very family of God.*

Thank God, the life after death that is offered to man is not to become some animal such as a fly or a mosquito.

God Almighty offers man His glorious grace to elevate man high above all animals—even above the angel kingdom—into the very Kingdom of God. That is the opportunity that God Almighty offers to every one of you.

It is *not* a reforming of some “immortal soul” that the great Creator God offers to you and me. *It is a new birth* onto a far higher plane—being born of God into the very family of God. Oh, how incomparably more wonderful is God’s truth than the false ideas of men!

Flesh is mortal. Flesh is matter. Spirit, however, is immortal. In II Corinthians 4:18 we read that the invisible things that are spiritual are eternal, but man is mortal. The only hope of ever having eternal life is through a new birth, with new life that can be imparted to us from God. That is not imparted at our natural

birth, but is imparted during and throughout our lifetime if we have repented, believed, and been baptized. It comes fully *at a resurrection* from the dead. And it’s God’s great gift—a new life from God, a birth, not of human parents, nor from human parents, but from God, who is the only Being who has immortality to give.

This is the greatest hope in life. It is the greatest fact in life. There is no salvation, there is no hope, there is no eternal life unless or until you receive the begetting of the Holy Spirit of and from God as His gift.

But there are terms and conditions. Notice what Paul wrote in Romans 8:9-11: “Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his [that is, he is *not* a Christian]. . . . But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken [make immortal] your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.”

Christ brought this colossal message from God. *He said in effect:* “Repent of disobedience to God’s rule, and God’s laws.” He further said you must believe in Jesus Christ and *believe the message* that He brought concerning the Kingdom of God, and about how we may be born into it. Then *you shall receive* this very gift of the Holy Spirit which is immortal life—the presence of eternal life within you—the very life, the very nature and the very character of God.

If you then live a life of overcoming and grow in grace and knowledge, *you shall be made immortal* at the second coming of Christ—by a resurrection from the dead. Or, if you are living at that time, you shall be changed into immortal spirit composition and *live forever!* □

RECOMMENDED READING

Be sure to write for your free copies of the following two booklets:

What Is the Reward of the Saved?
Life After Death?