

The Immortal Soul

Many believe we have an immortal soul, a spiritual component which leaves our body and lives forever after we die. Here is evangelist Billy Graham:

"Your soul is that part of you, made in the image of God, that lives inside of you, and that's the eternal part of you. That's the important part of you. That's the real you. That's the part of you that will be living a thousand years from now, either in heaven or hell . . . but you can not change the fact that you are a living soul, and that you're going to live somewhere forever."

And here are quotes from The Catechism of the Catholic Church:

"The Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God - it is not "produced" by the parents - and also that it is immortal: it does not perish when it separates from the body at death, and it will be reunited with the body at the final Resurrection."

"What is "rising"? In death, the separation of the soul from the body, the human body decays and the soul goes to meet God, while awaiting its reunion with its glorified body. God, in his almighty power, will definitively grant incorruptible life to our bodies by reuniting them with our souls, through the power of Jesus' Resurrection."

Now let's see what the Bible says. First, let's look for "immortal soul" in the Bible. This is easy to do using an online tool such as blueletterbible.org.

So here's the blueletter bible . . . there's the URL: blueletterbible.org. . . go to the search box and key in "immortal soul". . . and we can pick out which Bible we want to search . . . King James Version . . . hit the search button, and results come up over on the left . . . "immortal" and "soul" occurs zero times in zero verses in the King James . . . let's try the New King James . . . same thing there, zero times in zero verses in the New King James . . . try one more [NLT] . . . nothing there either.

I used blueletterbible.org and other online resources to check many Bibles. I did not find "immortal soul" in any of the Bibles I checked, including all of these:

- KJV (King James Version)
- NKJV (New King James Version)
- NET (New English Translation)
- NLT (New Living Translation)
- NIV (New International Version)
- ESV (English Standard Version)
- CSB (Christian Standard Bible)
- NASB (New American Standard Bible)
- RSV (Revised Standard Version)
- ASV (American Standard Version)
- YLT (Young's Literal Translation)
- DBY (Darby Translation)

WEB (Webster's Bible)
HNV (Hebrew Names Version)
CEB (Common English Bible)
RHE (Douay-Rheims Catholic Bible)
GW (GOD'S WORD Translation)
GNT (Good News Translation)
CSB (Holman Christian Standard Bible)
LEB (Lexham English Bible)
NCV (New Century Version)
NIRV (New International Reader's Version)
NRS (New Revised Standard)
OJB (Orthodox Jewish Bible)
BBE (The Bible in Basic English)
CJB (The Complete Jewish Bible)
MSG (The Message Bible)
TMB (Third Millennium Bible)
TYN (Tyndale)
WNT (Weymouth New Testament)
WEB (World English Bible)
WYC (Wycliffe)

The word "soul" does, of course, appear in the Bible, so just what is the "soul"? For one thing, it is not immortal: it can be destroyed. We know this because Jesus said "[And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.](#)" (Matthew 10:28)

Genesis 2:7 gives us an important insight to the meaning of "soul" in the Bible: "[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.](#)"

The man was not *given* a soul. The man *became* a soul. "Soul" in that verse is from the Hebrew word נֶפֶשׁ ("nephesh") which means a living creature, a live animal.

The very same Hebrew word is used for "[the moving creature that hath life](#)" (Genesis 1:20), the "[living creature that moveth](#)" (Genesis 1:21), the "[living creature](#)" (Genesis 1:24), the "[thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life](#)" (Genesis 1:30) and the "[living creature](#)" (Genesis 2:19).

"Soul" in the Bible does not mean some sort of immortal spiritual component that you have, which floats out of your body when you die. We don't *have* souls: we *are* souls - but with a different definition: we are living beings, persons or selves with thoughts, emotions, character, hopes etc.

Biblical context shows "soul" used many ways, for example referring to a person or persons, or to ones' self as in "I am," or to one's own life or existence. In these three New Testament examples "soul" is from the Greek word ψυχή "psyche":

Persons or people:

"And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls."
(Acts 27:37)

I am:

"Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death:
tarry ye here, and watch with me." (Jesus, in Matthew 26:38).

Life or existence:

"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own
soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26)

The "immortal soul" that floats out of you when you die is a myth passed down from pagan religion and adopted into mainstream Christianity over the centuries.

Here's an example. This fresco is in the Vatican. It was painted about 1509-1511 by the Italian Renaissance painter Raphael. It depicts the famed School at Athens, Greece, where Plato, Socrates, Aristotle and others taught and exchanged ideas hundreds of years before Christ.

Plato is on your left, talking to Aristotle.

The following text is from *Phaedo*, a dialogue written by Plato about 360 BC. Here he expounds on the immortal soul. See if this resembles what many professing Christians today believe:

"Do we believe that there is such a thing as death? And is this anything but the separation of soul and body? And being dead is the attainment of this separation; when the soul exists in herself, and is parted from the body and the body is parted from the soul . . . is not the conclusion of the whole matter this? - that the soul is in the very likeness of the divine, and immortal, and intelligible, and uniform, and indissoluble, and unchangeable; and the body is in the very likeness of the human, and mortal, and unintelligible, and multiform, and dissoluble, and changeable . . . beyond question the soul is immortal and imperishable, and our souls will truly exist in another world!"

The apostle Paul wrote:

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

We only have eternal life if it is given to us. If we actually had immortal souls, we would have no need for God to give us eternal life.

God put the first couple out of the Garden so they could not eat of the tree of life and so "live for ever." Apparently they did not have immortality:

"And the LORD God said, Behold, the 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, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken." (Genesis 3:22,23).

Salvation is not about - and never was about - *where* you will spend eternity. You won't even *have* an eternity - of any sort, anywhere - unless God gives you eternal life! Otherwise, you will perish in death.

"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."
(John 3:16)

The unsaved will perish in what the Bible calls the "second death." After resurrection for judgment, the unsaved will die a second time, without any further hope of consciousness or life or resurrection. They will simply not "be" anymore. Here are some verses which make it clear: the wicked will perish. They will be destroyed and will not "be" any more:

"For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be" (Psalms 37:10).

"When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever" (Psalms 92:7).

"The way of the LORD is strength to the upright: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity" (Proverbs 10:29).

"As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation" (Proverbs 10:25).

"Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon earth, That the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment? Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; Yet he shall perish for ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he?" (Job 20:4-7).

Take away the "immortal soul" error and there is no longer any need to speculate "where" immortal souls of the unsaved "spend" eternity! There will be no eternity, no eternal life, unless it is received as a gift from God.

The wicked have no existence after the "second death." Does that mean no one suffers eternal conscious torment in some kind of hell? Exactly!

What do you do with your trash? Do you take it out to your backyard and beat it with a stick, every day, day after day? Of course not. Aside being a waste of your time and effort, your neighbors would think you're crazy. What do you do? You throw it away; it goes to the dump for destruction.

That is similar to what will happen to the wicked. Jesus often referred to the dump outside Jerusalem (called γέεννα in Greek, "gehenna" in English) where fires burned continuously, destroying the city's refuse. He likened the fate of the wicked to being thrown into that dump, into "gehenna fire." They will be destroyed. Their destruction will be "eternal" in the sense that it will be permanent and finished; it will not be perpetual, ongoing punishing.

Both body and soul - the self, life, existence - can be destroyed. Jesus said:

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:28)

"Hell" in that verse is γέεννα - the dump - in the original text. Unfortunately the King James Version (and many others) always rendered γέεννα as "hell." Even worse, many Bibles also render the Greek ᾗδης ("hades," the grave) as "hell," only adding to the confusion. Other Bibles have avoided using "hell" altogether, avoiding the misinformation associated with "hell" by using transliterations like "gehenna" for the Greek γέεννα and using "hades" or "grave" for the Greek ᾗδης.

So what actually happens to the wicked? The Bible shows specifically what happens to some of them. After they surround "the beloved city," Jerusalem, they are reduced to ashes:

"And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,
And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.
And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them." (Revelation 20:7-9)

The Old Testament prophet Malachi gave this description:

"For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch . . .
And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts."
(Malachi 4:1,3)

The wicked will be reduced to ashes, outside Jerusalem, just as trash was destroyed in the "gehenna" dump outside Jerusalem long ago.