

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER

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FOR THE EATER

BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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CONCERNING IMMORTALITY

Forty years ago I wrote an article on the subject of immortality. Today I realize that the ideas then set forth were somewhat weak and immature, especially the definition of the words under consideration. I said then: "The word *mortal* signifies liability to death or capability of death. That which can die or is capable of dying is mortal. Immortality is incapacity of death. An immortal being is not liable to death, it cannot die. The word does not appear in Luke 20:36, but the truth of it is stated in regard to the sons of the resurrection when our Lord expressly asserted neither can they die any more. This can only mean that they are incapable of death, that is, they are immortal."

Those who have the bound volumes of my publication THE WORD OF TRUTH should write at the top of Volume V, page 25: "See also Seed and Bread, Issue No. **SB132**." All who read my publications must ever remember that my latest writings set forth my latest light. Today after many more years of study it is evident that I went astray by beginning my studies with the commonly accepted definition of the English word *immortality*, accepting the idea that it meant complete exemption from the possibility of death. **This was an error**, and it will be corrected in this study.

The Greek word for "immortality" is *athanasia*. This is found only three times in the New Testament: 1 Cor. 15:53, 1 Cor. 15:54, and 1 Tim. 6:16. It is compounded from the word *thanatos*, which means *death*, with the negating prefix *a* before it. This prefix is called "the alpha privative" in order to distinguish it from the Greek letter *alpha*. It serves the same purpose as our prefix *un* in the sense of *not* or *without*. Thus the elements of this word show that it means either not dying or without death.

The same is true of our word *immortality*. The base word *mortal* means death or dying, and the prefix *im* means *not* or *without*. Thus our English word means exactly what the Greek word means, either not dying or without death.

When we consider the creation of Adam and know that God pronounced His work "very good" (Gen. 1:31), we can believe nothing else but that there was no death

working in this man. He was not dying, he was without death; therefore, he was *athanatos* or immortal in the true meaning of both of these words. Death, in no manner worked within him. Nevertheless, he was subject to it as it clearly revealed in the warning of the punishment that would follow if he ate of the tree that was forbidden to Him:

And the Lord God 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.

In the Hebrew of the words "**thou shalt surely die**" is found a figure of speech used to set forth great emphasis, and this should read "**dying thou shalt die.**" It is so translated by Fenton, Young, Bullinger, Newberry, and others. This form of expression is common in Hebrew and it usually denotes the certainty of a thing. Thus, the very day that Adam partook of the forbidden fruit the phenomenal fact of death began to work within him and it continued to work until it gained the victory over him, bringing about his death at the extreme age of 930 years.

From the moment forth after Adam sinned every pain, ailment, disease, abscess, malady, fever, sore, eruption, infection, pestilence, virus, and infirmity that Adam may have experienced could all be attributed to the death that was working in him.

Paul elaborates on this in his declaration in **Romans 5:12: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."** The Greek of this passage is not difficult, and there is no dispute over the accuracy of the text. Literally it says: "**Therefore, even as through one man the sin came into the world, and through the sin the death, and thus the death passed through into all men (mankind) on which all sinned.** "

The last four words here are very important. They tell us that death at the first entered through sin, but now sin is transmitted through death. The sin that is now in the world plays upon the death that is at work in every man. We sin because we are dying (mortal). We are not born sinners (and no one should use Psalm 51:5 to prove otherwise), but we are born mortal (dying), and if one lives very long in this world it can be said in truth of him he too has sinned. Death passed upon all men, under which condition all have sinned, is the significance of "on which" in this passage.

The fact that all men are dying is indisputable. Death is universal, sinless infants, moral people, faith healers, equally with the immoral and depraved. This universal effect is not in any manner brought about by our own evil conduct, at least not in this dispensation of God's grace. Whenever God has laid illness or death upon anyone (1 Cor. 11 :29,30) it was upon those in whom death was already at work.

The new-born babe is mortal but it is not sinful. It will in time become a sinner as a result of its mortality. The whole stream of human existence was poisoned at the fountain head, Adam. He brought sin into the world, and out of this comes every misery that arises out of the death that works in us. In view of this we should be delightfully grateful and inexpressively thankful for the divine declaration: **"Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world"** (John 1 :29).

Everything has been done that is necessary to make this removal of sin a blessed reality. "It is finished" was the declaration of Christ while upon the cross. The removal of "the sin" that entered into the world through Adam and "the death" that accompanied it is one of the greatest blessings that comes with the kingdom of God. It will be a fact, a reality when God assumes sovereignty of the world that is rightfully His. He will not share His reign for one moment with the reign of sin and death. The sin (singular) must be removed. The death (singular) that works through sin will cease to reign and become subject to Him. Under God's government death will be possible, but it will be only by divine determination and decree (Ezek. 18:4, Jer. 31:30, 1 John 5:16). Death as an instrument of divine punishment will exist until it is abolished (1 Cor. 15:26).

The entrance of sin and death into the world had an adverse effect upon every living thing that makes up the world in which we live. Even inanimate things such as the soil itself is touched by the present reign of sin and death (Gen. 3:17-19). Therefore, the time must come when sin must be removed from the world and with it must go the death that works in everyone of us. This will be, for it is declared in 1 Cor. 15:53: **"For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."**

This declaration is related to a very important statement concerning the kingdom of God. In the preceding portion, Paul has used the word "inherit." The Greek word is *kleronomeo*, a word that sets forth two ideas (1) having a place, and (2) enjoying a portion. Both of these must be true in order for one to inherit. In the use of this word Paul says: **"Now this I say brethren that flesh and blood cannot have any place or enjoy any portion in the kingdom of God."**

The words "flesh and blood" here are figurative terms and have nothing to do with the soft tissues of the human body or the red fluid that flows through it. An examination of even a few of these figurative uses will demonstrate this. Note this in Matt. 16:17 where the Lord told Peter that **"flesh and blood had not revealed to him that He was the Christ."** Could this possibly mean that the Lord was telling him that the soft tissues of the human body were not the agency through which knowledge

came? If so, this would be a senseless communication. This cannot be what our Lord meant.

The word *flesh* is used to represent what we are by birth and development, in the way of physical makeup, personality, natural abilities. Blood is what we are by nationality or race. These things will never upgrade a man or downgrade a man under God's government, as they do under human governments today. We know quite well that anyone born *white* in the United States is born with a status that he can use to his advantage, while the one born *black* is born under a handicap that he will have to fight against all his days. We could well wish these things were not true, but they are, and it is senseless to deny them. Such things will not be and cannot be under God's government. What a man is by either flesh or blood will have no place and not be considered. A man's race or color will give him no advantages.

Furthermore, there is no place for corruption under God's government. Corruption in government abounds today. "Incorruptibility" is the one great characteristic that all nations must display when God governs. Four centuries before Christ, Plato boldly declared: "Then if anyone at all is to have the privilege of lying, the rulers of the state should be the persons; and they in their dealings either with enemies or their own citizens, may be allowed to lie for the public good" (*The Republic, Book III*).

It appears that Plato was insisting that a certain amount of corruption was essential. However, when God governs there will be no place given for even the smallest amount of corruption.

As Paul continues his revelation he declares: **"Behold! I am telling you a secret. 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. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality"** (1 Cor. 15:51-53).

The word *immortality* (*athanasia*) is found only three times in the Bible. Two of these occurrences have been considered. The third and most important reference is one that should cause every lover of truth to hesitate before he attributes immortality to any creature. In a direct reference to the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul declares that He alone has immortality (1 Tim. 6:16).

"But what about Enoch and Elijah? Do not they have immortality?" are questions sure to be asked. To this only one answer is possible. God has spoken and He says **"No." Jesus Christ is the only one who has immortality.**

Enoch and Elijah are not yet free from the death that passed upon all men. However, the working of it has been exceedingly slow, or else not in operation at all.

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