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HOW WE SHALL BE CHANGED Keith W. Stump

WHY DOES man exist? You can be assured that there is a definite reason for existence! Life is not the consequence of the process of evolution.

The Creator God made man in his own image for a purpose that transcends this physical life. Man, however, apart from God, cannot deeply know or comprehend this great purpose. Nor can he understand why humans live or why they die.

Much has been written about death. There are hundreds of books and articles available on the medical and psychological aspects of death, the cultural and social impact of death and the philosophical implications of death. Philosophers, teachers, preachers, historians, anthropologists---learned men of every discipline---have searched for the answer to the ultimate question, "What is death?" But they haven't know where to look.

There is only one source that reveals the true answer---God's instruction book, the Bible.

Physical Life Temporary

For there to be a creation there must be a Creator. That's one of the major proofs that God exists. And through God's revelations to us about this creation we can begin to unlock the secrets to the great mysteries of death, hidden to us apart from this revealed truth. But first we must learn more about life.

Exactly what is life? Physical life is purely a biological, chemical existence. In this regard man's life is no different than that of an animal (Eccl. 3:19); although the spirit in man makes him a special creature (Job 32:8; Zech. 12:1, I Cor. 2:9-14).

To answer the question "What is life?" directly, turn to the book of James.

"Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (James 4:14).

Life is physical. Life is temporal. Over and over in his Word God stresses the transient nature of life.

"For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away" (I Pet. 1:24).

"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone" (Ps. 103:13-16).

Genesis 2:7 describes the very first life being "born." Notice the exact wording of the verse: "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."

Three of the most fundamental truths concerning the life of man are packed into that one verse.

The first is: God formed man of the dust of the ground. Adam was composed of earth. Every cell, every tissue, every muscle and every limb was made from the dust of the ground. Man was, and is, a purely physical creation, composed of physical matter. At that moment of creation, man was no different than the rest of creation---a second, more profound event occurred:

"And the Lord God...breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." As God's breath passed through Adam's nostrils and filled his lungs with lifegiving oxygen, life began, which brings us to the third point:

"And man became a living soul." The last six words of that verse are very significant. It's important to realize that a soul was not placed within the man, separate from man. God said that man *became* a living soul. The man was a soul---physical, material, animal life---subject to death.

The original Hebrew word for soul is *nephesh*. Look it up in a lexicon. It is defined as breath, anything that breathes, an animal. *Nephesh* can even refer to a dead body. There's nothing supernatural about the soul. The soul merely means, in this case, man. Man is a soul. And the soul is not immortal. We're told that in Ezekiel 18:4, 20, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

Shocking, isn't it? Hundreds of millions of people have been led to believe that man has an immortal soul. But here God clearly says that the soul is composed of the dust of the ground. It is material, not spiritual. The soul (man) can die.

Ancient philosophers taught that man is essentially an immortal spiritual "soul" housed in a temporary body of flesh. At a person's death the soul leaves the body and journeys to a nebulous realm, possibly paradise or a place of punishment.

This doctrine has been perpetuated by Greek and Roman scholars and writers. The pagan teaching was slowly, over the centuries, injected into the churches by many of the early "church fathers."

Not only did this doctrine become religious dogma in the medieval world, those who rejected it were branded as heretics and often suffered death at the hands of the professors.

The apostle Paul gave instruction about believing this kind of nonsense: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Col. 2:8).

Nowhere does the Bible say the soul is immortal. Actually, it plainly teaches just the opposite. Read Peter's statement in Acts 2.

Here Peter clearly states that King David of Israel, one of the greatest men of God who ever lived---a man after God's own heart---is dead and buried. David is not in heaven. He's in his grave, with us unto this day:

"Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day" (verse 29).

"For David is not ascended into the heavens" (verse 34).

At death man ceases to exist. His body slowly returns to the elements from whence it came. "For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19). Death is the end of consciousness. As Ecclesiastes 9:5 points out, "The dead know not any thing."

Resurrection Our Hope

So God says death is death. There is no immortal soul. This being the case, is there any hope for man? Definitely! The resurrection from the dead is the whole hope of a Christian.

The Bible speaks in both Old and New Testaments of a resurrection of the dead---a re-creation of life. Paul was inspired by God's Holy Spirit to write one whole chapter of the Bible on the subject of the resurrection. You should study the 15th chapter of I Corinthians. If there were no resurrection, death would be the final victor (verse 54).

William Tyndale, the printer of the first New Testament in English, wrote: "In putting departed souls in heaven, hell or purgatory you destroy the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul prove the resurrection.... The true faith putteth the resurrection; the heathen philosophers, denying that, did put that souls did ever live ... If the soul be in heaven, tell me what cause is there for the resurrection?"

When a person dies, he is dead. There is no consciousness in the grave (Ps. 146:4). There is no remembrance in the grave (Ps. 6:5). If at death man's soul was released there would be no need for the resurrection.

The fact that the Bible teaches the resurrection from the dead is further proof that man has no immortal soul!

Job once asked, "If a man die, shall he live again?! He was inspired to answer his own question.

"O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come" (Job 14:13-14).

The Old Testament prophets knew about the resurrection of the dead. Job knew about the resurrection, and so did Daniel: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2).

In the New Testament the resurrection is the central theme and hope of the early Church. Jesus said: "For as the Father raiseth up the dead...even so the Son quickeneth whom he will...Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live ... Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:21-29).

Paul wrote in I Corinthians 15:50-52: "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; 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 resurrection from the dead was the paramount theme in the sermons of Peter and Paul (Acts 2:23-24, 32, 3:15, 26, 4:1-2; I Cor. 15:36-44, 52). A resurrection from the dead is our only hope of life after death. This is the truth of God. Because Christ conquered death, God's great purpose for man will be achieved.