

Do Some Bible Verses Teach We Have an Immortal Soul?

Some believe that various scriptures support belief in an immortal soul. Let's consider some of these passages and understand what they really say.

Matthew:10:28: Destroying soul and body in hell?

"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew:10:28).

Is Jesus teaching in this verse that the soul lives on after death and is immortal? Not at all. If you look at this scripture closely, you see that Jesus is actually saying that *the soul can be destroyed*. Jesus is here warning about the judgment of God. He says not to fear those who can destroy only the physical human body (*soma* in the Greek), but fear Him (God) who is also able to destroy the soul (*psuche*)—here denoting the person's physical being with its consciousness.

Simply stated, Christ was showing that when one man kills another the resulting death is only temporary; God can raise anyone to conscious life again either soon after death (see Matthew 9:23-25; 27:52; John 11:43-44; Acts 9:40-41; 20:9-11) or in the age to come after Christ returns to the earth. The person who has died is not ultimately gone forever. We must have a proper fear of God, who alone can remove one's physical life and all possibility of any later resurrection to life. When God destroys one in "hell," that person's destruction is permanent.

What is the "hell" spoken of in this verse? The Greek word used here is *gehenna*, which comes from the combination of two Hebrew words, *gai* and *hinnom*, meaning "Valley of Hinnom." The term originally referred to a valley on the south side of Jerusalem in which pagan deities were worshipped.

Because of its reputation as an abominable place, it later became a garbage dump where refuse was burned. *Gehenna* became synonymous with "a place of burning"—a site used to dispose of useless things.

Only God can utterly destroy human existence *and* eliminate any hope of a resurrection. The Scriptures teach that God will in the future burn up the incorrigibly wicked in an all-consuming fire, turning them to ashes (Malachi:4:3)—annihilating them forever.

1 Thessalonians 5:23: Spirit, soul and body?

Many are confused by an expression the apostle Paul uses in one of his letters to the Thessalonians: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians:5:23).

What does Paul mean by the phrase "spirit, soul, and body"?

By "spirit" (*pneuma*), Paul means the non-material component that is joined to the physical human brain to form the human mind. This spirit is not conscious of itself. Rather, it gives the brain the ability to reason, create and analyze our existence (see also Job 32:8; 1 Corinthians:2:11). By "soul" (*psuche*), Paul means the person's physical being with its consciousness. By "body" (*soma*), Paul means a physical body of flesh. In short, Paul wished for the whole person, including the mind, vitality of conscious life and physical body, to be sanctified and blameless.

Revelation 6:9-10

Souls of slain crying out?

"When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'" (Revelation 6:9-10).

To understand this scripture, we must remember the context. John was witnessing a vision while he was "in the Spirit" (Revelation 4:2). Under inspiration he was seeing future events depicted in symbolism. The fifth seal is *figurative* of the Great Tribulation, a time of world turmoil preceding Christ's return. In this vision, John sees under the altar the martyred believers who *sacrificed their lives* for their faith in God. These souls figuratively cry out, "Avenge our blood!" This can be compared to Abel's blood metaphorically crying out to God from the ground (Genesis 4:10). Though neither dead souls nor blood can actually speak, these phrases figuratively demonstrate that a God of justice will not forget the evil deeds of mankind perpetrated against His righteous followers.

This verse does not describe living souls that have gone to heaven. The Bible confirms that "*no one has ascended to heaven* but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven [Jesus Christ]" (John:3:13). Even righteous King David, a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), was described by Peter as being "dead and buried" (Acts 2:29), not alive in heaven or some other state or location (verse 34).