

Proof of a Separate State of Souls Between Death and the Resurrection

Part V

Isaac Watts

Founder of English hymnody, he was born at Southampton, England on July 17, 1674 and died at Stoke Newington, November 25, 1748. He obtained an excellent education at Southampton grammar school, then joining the dissenters, he studied at an academy at Stoke Newington, where he acquired his accuracy of thought and habit of laborious analysis; leaving the academy in 1694, he spent two years at home, beginning his hymn writing.

He was a private tutor, 1695-1701; became assistant pastor in the chapel at Mark Lane, 1699, and sole pastor in 1702. Because of frequent attacks of illness, Samuel Price had assisted him from 1703 and was chosen co-pastor 1713. His illness increased with time, but the congregation refused to part with one who had become so famous and beloved.

SECTION V

More Objections Answered

SINCE THIS BOOK was written, I have met with several other objections against the doctrine here maintained; and, as I think they may all have a sufficient answer given to them, and the truth be defended against the force of them, I thought it very proper to lead the reader into a plain and easy solution of them.

Objection VII. Is not long life represented often in Scripture, and especially in the Old Testament, as a blessing to man? And is not death set before us as a curse or punishment? But, how can either of these representations be just or true, if souls exist in a separate state? Are they not then brought into a state of liberty by death, and freed from all the inconveniences of this flesh and blood? By this means, death ceases to be a punishment, and long life to be a blessing.

Answer. It is according as the characters of men are either good or bad, and according as good men know, more or less, of a separate state of rewards or punishments, so a

long life, or early death, are to be esteemed blessings or calamities, in a greater or a less degree.

Long life was represented as a blessing to good men, in as much as it gave them opportunity to enjoy more of the blessings of this life, and to do more service for God in the world: and especially since, in ancient times, there was much darkness upon this doctrine of the future state, and many good men had not so clear a knowledge of it. Long life was also a blessing to wicked men, because it kept them in a state wherein there were some comforts, and withheld them, for a season, from the punishments of the separate state.

Death was doubtless a punishment and a curse, when it was first brought into human nature, by the sin of Adam, as it cut off mankind from the blessings of this life, and plunged him into a dark and unknown state: and, if he were a wicked man, it plunged him into certain misery.

But, since the blessings of the future state of happiness for good men are more clearly revealed, long life is not so very great a blessing, nor death so great a punishment, to good men; for death is sanctified, by the covenant of grace, to be an introduction of their souls into the separate state of happiness, and the curse is turned in some respect into a blessing.

Objection VIII. Was it not supposed to be a great privilege to Enoch and Elijah, when they were translated without dying? But what advantage would it be to either of them to carry a body with them to Heaven, if their souls could act without it?

I answer, when Enoch and Elijah carried their bodies to Heaven with them, it was certainly a sublime honor and a peculiar privilege which they enjoyed, to have so early a happiness both in flesh and spirit conferred upon them, so many ages before the rest of mankind. For though the soul can act without the body, yet as a body is part of the compounded nature of man, our happiness is not designed to be complete till the soul and body are united in a state of perfection and glory. This happiness was conferred early on those two favorites of Heaven.

Objection IX. Was it not designed as a favor when persons were raised from the dead under the Old Testament or the New, by the prophets, by Christ, and by His apostles? But what benefit could this be to them, if they had consciousness and enjoyment in the other world? Was it not rather an injury to bring them back from a state of happiness into such a miserable world as this?

Answer 1. Since these souls were designed to be soon restored to their bodies, and the persons were to be raised to a mortal life again in a few days, it is probable they were kept just in the same state of immemorial consciousness, as the soul is in while the body is in the deepest sleep; and so were not immediately sent to Heaven or Hell, or determined to a state of sensible happiness or misery. Then, when the person was raised to life again, there was no remembrance of the intermediate state, but all the

consciousness of that day or two vanished and were forgotten forever, as it is with us when we sleep soundly without dreaming.

Answer 2. If those who were raised by Christ, or the prophets, or the apostles, were pious persons, they submitted by the will of God to a longer continuance in this world, amid some difficulties and sorrows, which submission would be abundantly recompensed hereafter. If they were not good persons, their renewed life on earth was a reprieve from punishment. So there was no injury done to any of them.

As for those who were raised at the resurrection of Christ, and were seen by many persons in the holy city, there is no doubt but they were raised to immortality, and ascended to Heaven when Christ did, as part of His triumphant attendants, and went to dwell with Him in the heavenly state.

Objection X. If the martyrs and confessors were to be partakers of the first resurrection (Rev. 20:4, 5) would this not be punishment instead of a blessing, to be called from the immediate presence of God, and Christ, and angels, to be reunited to bodies on earth, and dwell here again with men? Therefore it seems more probable that the souls of these holy martyrs had no such separate existence, or enjoyment of happiness.

Answer. In any resurrection of good men to an animal life in this world, foretold by the prophets, and intended by the great and blessed God, I doubt not but they would be here so far separated from the wicked world, where sins and sorrows reign, that it would be a gradual advance of their happiness beyond what they enjoyed before in the separate state.

Objection XI. Though man is often said to be a compounded creature of soul and body, yet in Scripture he is represented as one being: it is the man that is born, that lives, that sleeps or wakes, and that rises from the dead. This is evident in many places of Scripture, where these things are spoken of; and it seems to be the law of our nature or being, that we should always act and live in such a state as souls united to bodies, and never in a state of separation.

Answer. Though there are several scriptures which represent man as one being, namely, soul and body united, yet there are many other scriptures which have been cited, in the former parts of this essay, wherein the souls and the bodies of men are represented as two very distinct things. The one goes to the grave at death, and the other either into Abraham's bosom, or to a place of torment. Either to dwell with God, to be present with Christ the Lord, and to become one of the spirits of the just made perfect, or to go to their own place as Judas did. Now those texts where man is represented as one being may be explained with very great ease, considering man as made up of two distinct substances, body and spirit united into one personal agent, as we have shown before. But the several texts where the soul and body are so strongly and plainly distinguished there is no possible way of representing but by supposing a separate state of existence for souls after the body is dead.

Objection XII. How does death come to be called so often in Scripture a *sleep*, if the soul is awake all the while?

Answer. Why is the repose of man every night called *sleep*, since the soul wakes, as appears by a thousand dreams? But as a sleeping man ceases to act in the business of affairs of this world, though the soul be not dead nor unthinking, so death is called *sleep*, because during that state men are cut off from the business of this world, though the soul may think and act in another.

Objection XIII. The Scripture speaks often of the judgment of mankind at the last great day of the resurrection, but it does not teach us the doctrine of a particular judgment, which the soul is supposed to pass under when every single man dies. Why then should we invent such a supposition, or believe such a doctrine of a particular judgment in a separate state?

Answer. It is evident in many scriptures, as we have shown before, that the souls of men after death are represented as enjoying pleasure or punishment in the separate state. The soul of Lazarus in Heaven, the soul of Dives in Hell, the soul of Paul as being present with the Lord, which is far better than dwelling in this flesh, or being present with this body. Therefore there must be a sort of judgment or sentence of determination passed upon every such soul by the great God, whether it shall be happy or miserable; for it can never be supposed that happiness or misery should be given to such souls without the determination of God the Judge of all; perhaps that text, Hebrews 9:27, refers to it: *It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment* — immediately after it.

Or suppose that in the separate state the pleasures or sorrows, which attend souls departing from the body, should be only such as are the necessary consequents of a life spent in the practice of vice or of virtue, of religion or ungodliness, without any formalities of standing before a judgment-seat, or a solemn sentence of absolution or condemnation. Yet the very entrance upon this state, whether it be of peace or of torment, must be supposed to signify that the state of that soul is adjudged or determined by the great Governor of the world. This is all that is necessarily meant by a particular judgment of each soul at death, whether it pass under the solemn formalities of judgment and a tribunal or not.

Objection XIV. If the saints can be happy without a body, what is the need of a resurrection? Let the body be as refined, as active, as powerful and glorious as it can be, still it must certainly be a clog to the soul; and this was the objection that the *heathen philosophers* made to the doctrine of the resurrection which the Christians profess; for the philosophers told them that this resurrection which they called their highest reward, was really a punishment.

Answer. The force of this objection has been taken away before, when it has been shown that man, being a creature compounded of body and spirit, was designed for its highest happiness, and the perfection of its nature in this state of union, and not in a

state of separation. And let it be observed, that when the body shall be raised from the grave, it shall not be such flesh and blood as we now wear, nor made up of such materials as shall clog or obstruct the soul in any of its most vigorous and divine exercises. But it will be a *spiritual body* (I Cor. 15:44), a body fitted to serve a holy and a glorified spirit in its actions and its enjoyments, and to render the spirit capable of some further excellencies, both of action and enjoyment, than it is naturally capable of without a body. What sort of qualities this new-raised body shall be endued with, in order to increase the excellency or the happiness of pious souls, will be, in a great measure, a mystery or a secret till that blessed morning appears.

Objection XV. Is not our immortality in Scripture described as built upon the incorruptible state of our new-raised bodies? (I Cor. 15:53). *This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*

Answer. It is granted that the immortality of the new-raised body is built on that corruptible sort of materials of which it is to be formed, or which shall be mingled with it, or the incorruptible qualities which shall be given to it by God himself. But the soul is immortal in itself, whether with or without a body; and he that can read all those texts of Scripture which have been before made use of in this Essay, wherein the existence of the spirit after the death of the body is so plainly expressed, and cannot find the immortality of the soul in them, or the spirit's capacity of existence in a separate state from the body, must be left to his own sentiments to explain and verify the expressions of Christ and His apostles some other way. Or he must acknowledge that these expressions are somewhat dangerous, since it is evident they lead thousands and ten thousands of wise and sober readers into this sentiment of the soul's immortality.

Whether the great God, the Governor of the world, has appointed souls to exist in a separate state of happiness or misery after the bodies are dead, seems to me to be so plainly determined in many of the scriptures which have been cited, that there is no sufficient reason to doubt the truth of it.

To conclude: though I think the doctrine of the separate state of souls is of much importance in Christianity, and that the denial of it carries great inconveniences and weakens the motive to virtue and piety, by putting off all manner of rewards and punishments to such a distance as the general resurrection, yet I dare not contend for it as a matter of such absolute necessity that a man cannot be a Christian without it. But this must be confessed, that they who deny this doctrine seem to have need of stronger inward zeal, to guard them against temptation, and to keep their hearts always alive and watchful to God and religion. Their motives to strict piety and virtue are sensibly weakened by renouncing all belief of this nearer and more immediate commencement of Heaven and Hell.

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