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#SS01

THE STUDY OF HUMAN DESTINY

An Introduction to a Series on

What Is Man

What Is His Destiny

BY Otis Q. Sellers
Bible Teacher

Foreword

Much of the material in this pamphlet was first published in the March, 1940 *issue* (Vol. IV, No. 2) of *The Word of Truth*. The interest it created and the demand for copies resulted in the article being carefully reconsidered and completely rewritten. It was then published as a separate pamphlet in April 1943. This *issue* was also exhausted and it has been out of print for several years. Now it has again been rewritten and enlarged, and is sent forth with the earnest prayer that it will quicken many minds to a faithful study of these things.

OTIS Q. SELLERS February, 1955

THE STUDY OF HUMAN DESTINY

It is a rule in publishing that the title of a book must be as short as possible. If it were not for this, the title of this pamphlet would probably be, *An Appeal to All Professing Christians to Reexamine and to Restudy the Subjects of the Nature of Man and the Destiny of Man*. This is the purpose of this pamphlet.

By inspiration of God, David asked the question, "**What is man?**" **Psalm 8:4**. Those who seek the Biblical answer to this query will be studying man's nature. *Job* by inspiration asked the question, "**If a man die, shall he live again?**" **Job 14:14**.

Those who seek the answer to this query will be studying man's destiny. This pamphlet is an appeal to all who profess to love God's truth to take up anew the study of these two great subjects.

It is the firm opinion of the writer of these lines that every possible detail of God's revelation that has any bearing upon the nature of man and the destiny of man needs to be reinvestigated and carefully appraised. All the ideas which are now held need to be laid aside for a time so that the Biblical revelation can be studied without prejudice. Once they are laid aside they should not be taken up again until we find them coming to us from the pages of God's book. The revelation of Scripture concerning the nature and destiny of man is not yet understood. If it is ever understood in this era, it will be because free and faithful men have dedicated themselves to the assiduous and progressive study of these subjects.

A Testimony

In the years that have elapsed since 1937 I have been actively engaged in setting forth certain teachings in regard to the nature of man and the destiny of man. These teachings have not been in the nature of dogmatic assertions, since, as a rule, they have been spoken or written studies in which I have tried to set forth what the sacred Scripture has to say upon some subject related to this theme. For example, I have taken classes, started *out* with Matthew's gospel, and have had the members to examine with me every passage in the New Testament that could have any possible bearing upon the nature and duration of future punishment. Studies such as these are bound to result in certain definite conclusions. They are *of* great value to the teacher as well as to those who are taught, for they result in an ever increasing understanding of the subject being considered. The conclusions resulting from this type of teaching have formed my beliefs upon the subjects under consideration. I present these conclusions to others because I sincerely believe them to be the truth of God. They are, to me, the Biblical answers to two of the most important questions the human mind can ask, "What is man?" and "What is his destiny?" These questions concern man's existence in this life and his position in the life to come. The true answer to them is to be found only in the Word of God. When this answer is found and believed it will bring satisfaction to the heart that longs for the truth, and it will give peace and assurance in the face of death and the grave.

My first honest, open study of these subjects began in 1934, and it has never ceased since that time. It still goes on, for I do not claim to have reached perfection of truth in regard to these great themes. I refuse to be identified with any "closed system of belief" concerning these matters. The only claim made is that I have labored diligently in the sacred Scriptures to find its message concerning these things. These labors have been progressive. The things which I now believe and teach are the fruit of these efforts.

I do not hesitate to say that my teaching on these subjects is radically opposed to what many godly and sincere men hold to be the truth. My views are not "orthodox" according to the way men measure orthodoxy, but I sincerely believe that they are in harmony with the Word of God. Many "orthodox" men would brand my teachings as rank heresy. This disturbs me not at all. In answer to all such charges I repeat the words of Paul recorded in **Acts 24: 14: But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets.**

It also needs to be said that my teaching upon some of these subjects may not be pleasant to the average hearer. No man would ever think of declaring some of the things which I do if he desired to have a popular ministry. Neither would he think of proclaiming them if he were anxious to proclaim a message which is already generally believed, one which the superficial hearer can grasp apart from any exercise of heart and mind.

A very definite antipathy and antagonism is continually being created toward any teaching that veers in the least from the generalities that make up the so-called "orthodox" position. This antagonism often turns into resentment and bitterness toward the teacher. All this must be patiently endured. Therefore, it is in the hope that a better understanding of my mind and purpose may be had by all who hear and consider my teaching on these subjects that this testimony and appeal is sent forth.

From personal observation I know that in many places sincere men and women are now inquiring whether the commonly accepted views of man's nature and destiny are derived from the Word of God. The spirit of honest inquiry is being manifested in many places. This is sure to increase, and it will increase in spite of the efforts of some self appointed custodians of the faith to stifle it. Never again will it be stifled, as it has been in the past, by the convenient but uncharitable cry of "damnable heretic." This is not the Middle Ages. Men are no longer afraid of the word *heretic*. They do not quickly turn away from ideas because men have said they are "damnable." They know that every precious truth which the Christian holds today was called "damnable heresy" by some man at one time. In many hearts the desire to be Scriptural, the desire to know what God has revealed, far exceeds the desire to be praised by men for being "orthodox."

At the present time there is a great resurgence of interest in the things of God. This is cause for thanksgiving, even though the seekers are having some difficulty ascertaining the true things of God. The two world wars that are now history have done much to accelerate interest in the question of human destiny. Furthermore, the emphasis which is now being placed upon psychiatry and psychology has kindled a

desire in the hearts of many for a true Biblical psychology. It is most evident that those who have become interested in things divine are not rushing forward to embrace the traditional ideas concerning man's nature and destiny. The time may very soon come when many of those who now appear to be little more than superficial converts will turn to men who profess to know and to teach the Word of God and demand of them to be told what the Bible has to say about the nature and destiny of man.

If this should happen, the man who professes to teach the Word will fail God if he attempts to pass on to them the confused and illogical errors of the Platonic philosophy as to the nature of man. He will also fail God if he attempts to persuade them of the correctness of the Augustinian view of "eternal, conscious torment."

If we are to be ready to give to men a reason for the hope that is in us, then we will need to reconsider and restudy every word that God has spoken upon these subjects. The facts are in the Word of God, but we must find these facts and then fit them into an honest formula that will speak the truth when it is presented.

It is a great tragedy that to many minds the very idea of reexamining and reinvestigating the subject of man's nature and destiny is felt to be disloyal to the Lord Jesus Christ. They feel that a blind acceptance of traditional ideas is the only way to honor Him, that Bible study along these lines cannot lead us into any truth, that it will only result in the loss of what truth we have. They insist that we must preach "hell" without ever trying to discover what the word "hell" means, that there is nothing to be gained by studying the Scriptures concerning these subjects.

There came a time in my own experience when I determined that the entire subject of man's nature, man's destiny, and the nature and duration of future punishment needed to be thoroughly investigated and studied. This determination had slowly developed through a previous decade. It was no sudden inspiration. In time it became a powerful conviction, and this has kept me steadily engaged at the task throughout the years that have passed. This labor has ever been a source of increasing joy, since as a result of it I have entered into an ever increasing understanding of God's revelation concerning these subjects.

It is written in the Word of God that the tiller of the soil must be the first to get a share of the crop (2 Tim. 2:6). This has been my happy experience. The personal benefits derived from these labors have been more than sufficient reward. Other men may despise my efforts or ridicule my findings. I cannot complain if they do this. I rest in the satisfaction of having gone to the Word of God and to the best of my ability having considered everything written there that has any bearing upon the subjects of man's nature and man's destiny.

My studies have increased the conviction that a correct understanding of the truth concerning these matters is fundamental to a true understanding of all other doctrines

that relate to man. If our theology is false on these matters, it will be warped and twisted on all other matters. Because of this it has ever been my earnest desire to lead others over the paths that I have traveled, in order that they might check for themselves the things I believe I have discovered.

However, I am not too hopeful in regard to this, since there is an almost complete unwillingness among professing Christians to *give* any honest consideration to the subjects in question. My efforts along this line are often dismissed with a word of contempt. Many refuse to believe that I have found or could find anything that might even remotely be the truth.

One would need to be totally devoid of feeling *if* he did not experience a keen sense of disappointment when, after years of devotion to the Word of God, he reads the comments of those who insist that he bought someone's book and found in *it* the teachings he now sets forth. This has been my experience. Men who claim to have personal knowledge of me say that I have cast my lot with some group whose unwritten creed requires me to accept certain ideas as being the truth. This is entirely false. The truth is that this student of the Word of God came as a result of his own studies to the place where certain inexorable facts and all their implications had to be faced. I came to a place in my studies where the results had to be embraced or rejected. I made choice of what I sincerely believe to be "the way of truth."

Therefore, to the end that my labors in behalf of the Word of God may not be hindered by misconceptions and misunderstandings, *it* seems well that I should here relate some of the personal experiences that in part led me to my present position in regard to these subjects. This will help any who hear or who read my teachings on man's nature and destiny to better understand the heart and mind of the one who declares these things.

Early Experiences

It is a practice in many evangelical churches and movements to urge a new convert to get busy in the Lord's service just as soon as he makes his initial confession of faith in Jesus Christ. They think it best to make a "Martha" out of every Christian, forgetting that *it* was Mary who chose the better part, namely, to *sit* at the feet of Christ and hear His word (Luke 10: 38-42). This happened in my experience. Everyone urged me to serve. No one urged me to study. I earnestly desired to serve the Lord, but I was not interested in the "make work" activities offered by the local church. I launched out, and had not known the Lord many months before I was busily engaged in preaching in street meetings, mission halls, and small churches. Inasmuch as I went from place to place, such work did not require much knowledge or many messages.

The half-dozen sermons that I had developed on as many subjects soon became very familiar to me. I was able to give them with all the assurance of an experienced veteran. I had no background of Biblical knowledge, but by stringing together the few things that I did know, condemning the things that I knew to be wrong, commending the things that I knew to be right, adding to all this some anecdotes and illustrations, I was able to satisfy that class of people who have no thirst for knowledge, but who do like to hear a lively message.

This group of non-progressive Christians was predominant at that time. They still dominate the religious world today. It is this group that the time-serving minister must keep in mind as he prepares his message and performs his service. They give organized religion the character that it displays today. The hireling shepherd feels that it is best to go along with them. Therefore, he does not permit his message to rise above the level of their superficial knowledge. Neither does he say anything that might disturb them or cause them any spiritual exercise. Their childish beliefs must never be challenged.

As I look back upon my first year of Christian experience, I am both amazed and amused at how little one can know and yet satisfy the average audience that has gathered for a religious service. And it was during this first year that I discovered how sudden and violent the reaction would be when a speaker said something that did not fit into well worn patterns of thought

One thing that stands out in my memories of that first year is that in those few messages I had quite a bit to say about "hell-fire" and "eternal conscious torment" No hesitation was shown in declaring these things, and, since they were in harmony with what the average religious man believed, they usually brought forth some emphatic "amens" from those in the audience. This encouraged me to strengthen my declarations. It was with some satisfaction of faithfulness that I felt I held men over the pit until they smelled the smoke. I now feel that I spoke of hell with all the assurance and knowledge of one who had recently been there.

I am still wondering where all this knowledge came from. I had never been a student of the Bible, had never sat under the ministry of a Bible teacher, yet my ideas as to the nature of future punishment had already reached finality. At that time I would have readily admitted that I could learn more about my beliefs, but I would not have admitted that I could learn anything which would change them. In regard to the nature and duration of future punishment, my beliefs were fixed before I ever began to study.

My attitude at that time will have to be attributed to a zeal without knowledge. Such an attitude could have gone on throughout my lifetime, but it did not. It took no more than a year of such trifling with the service of God and the Word of God to awaken me to the superficiality of the work I was doing. An intense desire awakened within

me for a full and accurate knowledge of the Bible. I believe that this was in answer to a prayer which I daily uttered to God - "Make me a real student of your Word:"

The second year of my Christian experience found me enrolled as a student in a Bible Institute. In the course of my studies there, the time arrived when we were to consider in the Bible Doctrine Class the subject of future punishment. On other subjects the students had been willing to take the notes as given by the teacher without asking *too* many questions. But on this subject they were filled with questions, problems, doubts, and difficulties. These had been generated by a discussion that had arisen several weeks before in another class, one on personal evangelism. We were considering the question of how to deal with the objector who says, "there is no hell" We were being taught to have ready a half-dozen passages in which the word *hell* appears and to quote these to the objector. A student declared that he did not believe that it would be honest to use any of these verses in this manner. This started a discussion which consumed the rest of the class period. It produced no concrete results, and the discussion continued in the dormitory for several days. Because of this many of the students looked forward to the time when the subject of future punishment would be taken up in the Bible Doctrine Class.

In this class the teacher listened with patience as these problems were presented and discussed for the greater part of an hour. When he took up the subject he admitted the reality and the sincerity of the problems that had been presented. He stated that most of these had troubled theologians for many years, and reminded us that we were only beginners without the necessary background of experience for grappling with such great themes. He further declared that a knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew was essential to the study of these subjects, and that many of our problems would be solved as our knowledge of the Bible increased. As a final word he warned us that if we persisted in trying to answer all our questions and solve all our problems, we might end up by embracing one of the heresies that had troubled the church throughout its history.

At that time I agreed heartily with all that the instructor had said. Being the youngest student in the class, my part in the discussion had been only that of an interested listener. I was fully satisfied to leave all such problems and difficulties to those who had the experience and knowledge required for dealing with them. I had gone to that Bible school because I understood it taught what I believed. Therefore, I took the notes, studied them carefully to become familiar with them. By so doing I added a little to my knowledge of the orthodox view of future punishment without making any changes in my beliefs. I was happy to know that I was believing the same as godly men had believed down through the centuries. I did not know at that time that there had never been any agreement among godly men as to the nature and duration of future punishment.

This complacent state of affairs continued for about five years, until I found myself trying to do faithfully the work of a Bible - teaching pastor. I was exhorting all who came under my ministry to become personal students of the Word of God. Our work was an open one. We were inviting all who were interested in knowing what the Bible said to come and study with us. It was then that I discovered that I was expected to answer the same questions and solve the same problems that had arisen in the Bible Doctrine Class five years before. These questions had not been answered then, and I had not found the answers in the years that had passed. I had no answers to these questions. This disturbed me quite a bit, especially so since I had determined before God always to try to give honest answers to the questions of honest people.

I could have accused those who raised these questions of "heresy," but if I had done so I would have been accusing myself of heresy for I had been a party to the raising of such questions five years before this. I could have charged that they were seeking to inject their "heresies" into our work. This would have driven them out, but it would have left me with a disturbed conscience. True, some of them may have been seeking to put over their own ideas 'by means of questions, but most of them were honestly looking for help from the one who professed to have help to offer on Biblical matters.

I felt the need of fortifying my beliefs. To this end, I secured a copy of *Facts and Theories as to a Future State* by F. W. Grant, *Human Destiny* by Sir Robert Anderson, and *Progress in the Life to Come* by James M. Gray, also a number of other books and pamphlets, all of which I understood to be in harmony with the orthodox views upon the subject. Once again I learned more about what I already believed, and I avoided changing anything which I did believe.

In these writings I found what claimed to be the answers to many of the questions and the solutions to many of the problems that had arisen. However, it was impossible for me to fully sympathize with some of the lines of argument used by these writers. For example, it did not seem reasonable for a man to say that the Greek word **hades** does *not* mean hell, then go right on and use the passages in which *hades* is translated "hell" to prove something about hell. Furthermore, they proved far too much by the story of "the rich man and Lazarus," ignoring altogether the great number of other things that could be proved by it if someone set himself to take literally every word of it. These things caused me some doubt; nevertheless, these writings greatly strengthened my mind in regard to the orthodox position.

With my beliefs thus fortified, I prepared some new studies on the subjects of man's nature and destiny. These were given with much assurance for a time, but I was far from satisfied. I can now say in all humility that my one desire and one goal was the truth, but I had become fouled up for a time with the desire to be orthodox. However, the desire for accurate truth was always paramount in my mind.

A change of location brought a temporary end to the discussion of these subjects. I was no longer under pressure to say something almost every week about them. I went on to increase my familiarity with the Word of God, and as familiarity increased, I realized that many things which I believed concerning the nature and destiny of man were not in harmony with the inspired Scriptures. The conviction grew that it was my duty under God to begin anew and restudy these subjects from the Word of God. The task seemed so great that I hesitated. I hardly knew how or where to begin. For some time I postponed the beginning of the work, but gave much time to meditation upon the task before me. The matter was seldom out of my mind. I knew the price that would have to be paid if I made any radical change in my beliefs. However, this price was paid because of another matter (the question of ordinances) and I was free to begin the work. It began with just one goal before me - the truth of God's Word, whatever it may be. This labor has now continued over a space of twenty years. It is not yet complete. It will not be completed in my lifetime. However, much progress has been made, and the labor has given me much joy because of the rich treasures I have found in the Word of God.

It is my present conviction that the Scriptures cannot be rightly comprehended without a true knowledge of the nature and destiny of man. I believe it is the sacred duty of all who profess the name of Christ to reexamine and restudy these subjects in order to find what is revealed concerning them in the Word of God.

I have no dogmatic teachings to present concerning these matters. I have reached no irrevocable conclusions. I do not desire to impose my findings upon others. But I do desire with all my heart to stir up men to undertake the study of these subjects. Honest investigation and study will always bring results. The benefits that would come from a great host of men studying the Word of God to find what it reveals as to the nature and destiny of man would result in still greater blessings to the people of God. This would in reality be the great revival of Bible study that is so sorely needed today. Many are praying for such an awakening.

Therefore, for the purpose of stirring up minds and provoking God's people to become personal students of the Word, I desire to set forth a series of propositions which I believe are deserving of consideration by all thinking Christians. **Each proposition will present an argument for the reexamination and restudy of man's nature and man's destiny**

Propositions

PROPOSITION 1. People are again seeking for the fresh and pure water from the living fountain of God's Word in regard to these subjects.

Those who minister the Word of God by means of radio or the printed-page, which results as a rule in many questions being sent to them, know very well the vast amount of interest in any matter that *is* related to the nature of man or to the destiny of man. My own experiences in such ministries have brought the conviction that the people are longing for something fresh, accurate, and definite upon such subjects as the soul, the human spirit, the nature of death, the state of man between death and resurrection, and the nature and duration of future punishment. **They desire to know the exact meaning of such words as *sheol, hades, gehenna, destruction, perish, torment, paradise, and heaven.*** They would like to have accurate knowledge as to the nature and meaning of the second death and the lake of fire. These people are not turning from the Word of God, but they are asking that those who profess to teach the Word shall take them into the sacred Scriptures in regard to these subjects.

We who profess to be teachers of the Word can direct them to the Bible for the knowledge they desire, but we must face the fact that they will come back to us with the same words that the Eunuch spoke to Philip, "How can I understand except some man should *guide* me" (Acts 8: 30, 31). If this should happen shall we then seek to satisfy their honest desire for the truth by leading them to drink of the stagnant pools of human tradition, or shall we take them to the fountainhead of all truth, where the facts of God gush forth in all their purity?

If men ask us to lead them into truth, how can we lead them over paths we have never traveled ourselves? How can we help them unless we have first helped ourselves? Shall we deliberately assume the role of the blind leading the blind? Can we ask God to bless our teaching of others if we have refused to study in *His* school?

To every believer in Jesus Christ who professes to be a *dispensational* Bible student, I would make the following plea. In view of the fact that we have discovered that there *is* no satisfying or abiding truth in the old creedal theology on most Biblical subjects, why should we deceive ourselves into thinking that there *is* perfection of truth in the old creedal theology concerning man's nature and man's destiny? As we seek to deliver men from the bondage of tradition upon every other subject, should we not just as zealously seek to deliver them from tradition concerning these two subjects. Since we have turned our backs upon so many ideas that have no authority in the Word of God, shall we not rigidly examine everything that is taught upon these subjects to see if the present popular conception has any real support in the Scriptures?

PROPOSITION 2. *In regard to man's nature and destiny, vast spheres of revelation have been disregarded, and this has resulted in the confusion which part-truth engenders.*

As an example, it can be pointed out that there is a vast reservoir of information in the Old and New Testaments in regard to heaven. There are hundreds of positive references, but none of these are ever considered by men in forming their opinions concerning the meaning of this word. They bury all this information under the rubbish heap of the childish idea that heaven is a beautiful place where all good people go when they die. Thus, the idea of *heaven* that prevails in Christendom is wholly imaginary, and has no real basis in the Word of God. This subject alone is worthy of the most diligent study ;upon the part of all who profess to be students of the Word.

PROPOSITION 3. *The commonly accepted views on man's destiny were developed by a process that eliminated the greater part of the Word of God from the witness stand.*

This is one of the prime reasons why the whole subject needs to be restudied and restated. We who honor the Word cannot be satisfied with doctrines that can only be maintained by ignoring the Old Testament revelation and refusing to permit it to give its testimony. This attitude goes to such extremes that men deny that *Ecclesiastes* is a revelation from God. This denial has been made by many leaders in the fundamentalist movement. *Ecclesiastes* is regarded as being nothing more than the inspired record of the faulty reasonings of a man. This charge is severe, but it can be supported by quotations from their own writings.

In the introductory words to his exposition of *Ecclesiastes*, Arno C. Gaebelin makes the following declaration:

"But this inspired record is not revelation in the sense, for instance, as the Epistle to the Ephesians. It is not divine revelation for man to be guided by. It is not revelation concerning that which is above the sun, nor the future. We mention this because those who hold the evil doctrines of soul-sleep and also annihilation go to *Ecclesiastes* and quote (9:5-10) as being "the Word and Revelation of God" when it is not" *The Annotated Bible*, Vol. 4 page 57 (Publication Office, "Our Hope" 1921).

I do not believe in either soul-sleep or annihilation, but I do most surely believe that *Ecclesiastes* is a revelation from God, and that its testimony must not be excluded when men seek the truth concerning man's destiny. The above quotation is not an isolated example. Here is another. In a note on Ecclesiastes 9: 10, C. I. Scofield declares:

"Verse 10 is no more divine revelation concerning the state of the dead than any other conclusion of "the Preacher" (Eccl. 1: 1) is such a revelation . . . No one would quote verse 2 as a divine revelation. These reasonings of man *apart* from divine revelation are set down by inspiration just as the words of Satan (Gen. 3:4; Job 2:4, 5, etc.) are so set down." "The Scofield Reference Bible, page 702.

From these two quotations it will be seen. that no part of the book of *Ecclesiastes* is allowed to give any testimony concerning the destiny of man. And that this attitude is not confined to that one book alone can be shown by another quotation. In discussing the matter of death and that which follows after it, H. A. Ironside says:

"The Bible alone gives us positive knowledge. But to what part of our Bible shall we turn for light on these great matters? Not to the Old Testament. Please keep that distinctly in mind." "*Death and Afterwards* by H. A. Ironside, page 17, Loizeaux Brothers, New York.

In view of such statements as these, it is evident that the whole subject of man's nature and destiny needs to be reconsidered by men who will permit the first thirty-nine books of the Word of God to freely shed their light upon this subject. And it must not be thought strange that men who have studied these subjects, and who have permitted the whole Bible to give its testimony should be found believing somewhat different from those who limit their study to the New Testament.

PROPOSITION 4. *The results of Biblical research have not been allowed to shed their light upon the great subjects of man's nature and man's destiny.*

During the past century much labor has been expended upon the task of uncovering and recovering the truth of the Bible. God has raised up men who at great sacrifices have provided us with excellent, sharp tools in the way of Concordances, Lexicons, and Versions. Certain Greek manuscripts have been discovered, and other manuscripts, not hitherto available, have been made available to students of the Word.

Biblical research has brought forth some excellent aids to the study of the sacred Scriptures. All this has resulted in great advances in Biblical knowledge. However, the great advances made in Bible study during the past century have not been allowed to shed their light upon the subjects of human nature and human destiny. Past and present leaders of Biblical thought have not permitted these subjects to be restudied, revised, or restated in the light of many truths now generally known concerning the Word of God, truths that were unknown or hidden a hundred years ago. To all present leaders the ideas of restudy and revision are suggestive of the rejection of the Bible, and are looked upon as being a wandering into "heresy." In regard to this the words of Emil Brunner are certainly true:

"It is a well-known fact that dogmatists and Church leaders often pay but small attention to the results of New Testament research." 'Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church*, page 5, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1953.

PROPOSITION 5. *Christendom as a whole has no definition of the soul that conforms to the revealed facts of Scripture, and it has no teaching upon the subject that is in harmony with the Word of God,*

Just as the commonly held views of Satan came from Milton and not from the Bible, even so the commonly held views of the soul came from Plato and not from the Word of God. I do not believe that any man can honestly examine the statements of Scripture concerning Satan and still hold the Miltonic view. Neither can I believe that any man can honestly consider the 859 occurrences of the Hebrew word **nephesh** and the Greek word **psuche** (the words that mean *soul*) and still hold the Platonic view of the soul. There is at all times much talk about the immortality of the soul, yet the only support offered for such a belief are inferences that could *just* as properly be used to teach the exact opposite. Scripture speaks of souls dying and of dead souls, but never once of an immortal soul.

The early *Apologists* spent most of their time and energies seeking to reconcile Christianity with Greek philosophy. They never demanded that Greek philosophy yield to the Word of God, for they labored to show that the Bible said the same as the philosophers. Thus the Bible was twisted to teach the ideas of Plato concerning the soul. His ideas were superimposed upon the Word of God. All this needs to be reconsidered.

PROPOSITION 6. *The statements of many respected Christian leaders and thinkers reveal that the - matter of man's nature and destiny needs to be restudied.*

Martin Luther, in his response to Pope Leo X said:

"I permit the Pope to make articles of faith for himself and his faithful, such as . . . the Pope is the emperor of the world and the king of heaven, and God upon earth, *the soul is immortal*, with all those monstrous opinions to be found in the Roman dung-hill of decretals:'

J. N. Darby, in *The Hopes of the Church*, published in 1841, made the following statement:

"We would express our conviction that the idea of *the immortality of the soul* has no source in the gospel; that it comes on the contrary from the Platonists and that it was just when the coming of Christ was denied in the church, or at least began to be lost sight of, that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul came in to replace that of resurrection. This was about the time of Origen. It is hardly needful to say that we do not doubt the immortality of the soul; we mark the fact only that this view has taken the place of the doctrine of the resurrection of the church, as the epoch of its joy and glory."

While this statement reveals the blinding and binding power of tradition, it very pertinently shows the need for examining the basis for all such doctrines as the immortality of the soul.

Consider also these statements from the writings of J. Gresham Machen, one of the greatest men in the Presbyterian Church in the past century. His words make a powerful argument for a restudy and restatement of the Biblical truth of man's nature and destiny.

"The Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body is very different from the Greek idea of immortality. "I think, then, that the threefold division of man's nature into body, soul, and spirit is out of accord with the true meaning of that great passage in the second and third chapters of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. But are there not other passages in the Bible that seem to favor that three-fold division?"

It seems to me that the only passage which can be appealed to with any plausibility as doing so is found in I Thess. 5:23, where Paul prays that his readers' spirit and soul and body may be kept whole and without blame at the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ. But certainly that passage cannot be used to overthrow the clear teaching of the rest of the Epistles of Paul and the rest of the Bible. It seems clear that Paul is just using a fullness of expression there to express his hope that the whole being of the Thessalonian readers may be kept so as to stand blameless at the coming of Christ. He is just heaping up words to express that idea. I think we may say that if there had been other words, in addition to the two words 'soul' and 'spirit', to express the idea he would have used those other words too.

"We ought to reject very firmly, therefore, the view that the nature of man is divided by the Bible into body, soul, and spirit. The more I reflect about the matter, the more I am convinced that the view of the threefold nature of man is a rather serious error. It is an error that has been held by a great many devout Christian people, and it has been learnedly and reverently defended; and yet it is a serious error all the same." J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian View of Man*, (The Macmillan Company, New York, 1937) PP. 186-187.

We will do well if we give due heed to Dr. Machen's statement that the idea of the tripartite nature of man is "a serious error." A correct understanding of the nature of man is primary and foundational. Apart from it no abiding structure of truth can be built. Its study should be the beginning of all Bible study. If this conviction should seize every believer, it would result in a great revival of Bible study - the real revival that is needed today.

PROPOSITION 7. *It is quite evident to anyone who has gained some familiarity with the Biblical facts concerning the subject, that the present generation of ministers has no accurate teaching about the subject of future punishment.*

Future punishment for the sins of the present life is certainly taught in Scripture. However, the complete silence of the majority of ministers concerning this subject is appalling. Sermons are announced upon it, but the time is spent warning men to flee from it. Those who do declare that there will be future punishment for the sins committed in this life do not give any evidence that they have gone to the Scriptures and done the work that is necessary before one can claim to possess the truth. Their messages do not show that they arrived at their convictions as a result of analysis and understanding of the revealed facts. They have not learned the facts, so they have no facts to put together. Some boldly speak of "hell bound sinners," "the doomed and the damned," warn men that when they die they are going to "wake up in hell." However, such language as this never came out of the Word of God. Some make *sheol* to be hell, *hades* to be hell, *gehenna* to be hell, or the *lake of fire* to be hell. They are not quite sure just which place is hell, or which word *hell* should be used to translate. The fact is they have taken some things spoken concerning *sheol*, *hades*, *gehenna*, destruction, and the lake of fire, mixed these up with some things said about the punishments of the great tribulation, seasoned this with some wailing and gnashing of teeth, and then served this concoction with the bold claim that it is the Bible doctrine of future punishment.

These men do not dare to separate, classify, and appraise their materials. They have not taken Scriptural facts and worked them into an honest teaching. Such actions are not worthy of those who claim to be proclaiming the Word of God.

Proposition 8. *Since God has spoken concerning death, it becomes our duty to give earnest heed to all that He has said and to be found believing His testimony concerning it.*

For many centuries there has been a studied and deliberate effort upon the part of men to make death to be everything except that which it is declared to be in the Word of God. There we find that death entered the world by sin, that is-- it is the penalty for sin, that it came in by sin, that it is an enemy, and that it is to be abolished. Men are willing to accept the true meaning of the word *death* as long as it is related to animals, but when they find it used of man, they reject its true meaning and make it mean something altogether different. They have tried to change the character of death by calling it attractive names. They speak of it as "departure to be with Christ," "the entrance into a fuller life," or "going to be with the Lord." But as long as God has branded it as an enemy, the child of God cannot consider it as a friend. God always associates life with good and death with evil. He declares that the wages of sin is death. In spite of His declarations, man refuses His testimony and denies the reality of death altogether. Man makes his hope to be in death, and exalts it as being the very door of entrance into all the blessings that God has promised to men. All this needs to be carefully reconsidered.

PROPOSITION 9. *The generally accepted view of death makes the grand experience of resurrection to be an anti-climax, and, of no essential value to the believer.*

If, as it is so confidently asserted, death ushers the believer into the presence of Christ, then resurrection can add nothing to this, neither can it accomplish anything that will in any way compare with this grand experience. If the "orthodox" conception of death is true, then the dead will be happy in heaven or miserable in hell whether they rise from the dead or not. But if the Scriptural conception *is* true, then resurrection *is* of the utmost importance, for without *it* then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. (1 Cor. 15:18).

Since death *is* the result of the sin of one man (Adam), and resurrection *is* the result of the righteousness of one man (Christ), *it* cannot be right to make the result of Adam's *sin* to be the experience that will usher us *into* the blessings of Christ. We should be willing to reexamine any teaching that causes the hope of men in Christ to be in death rather than *in* resurrection. God's answer to death *is* resurrection. God's remedy for death *is* resurrection. We dishonor God's testimony when we make resurrection to be the reversal of a disembodied condition. **Resurrection is the reversal of death.**

We preach the death of Christ. But what would our answer be if an honest enquirer came to us asking *if* He really died, and *if* He were truly dead for three days and three nights. What answer would we *give if* asked, "If He had not risen from the dead,

would He still be dead?" Would we still be able to say, "We do not preach a dead Christ," *if* He had not risen from the dead?

When the Apostle Paul sought to comfort the sorrowing saints *in* Thessalonica, did he comfort them by assuring them that their loved ones were happy in heaven, or did he set before them the hope of resurrection (1 Thess. 4:13-18)? Did not the greatest Comforter who ever spoke a word of consolation say to the one whose brother had recently died, "Thy brother shall rise again" (John 11 :23) ? If these questions are honestly considered they will increase the conviction that the whole matter of death and resurrection needs to be restudied.

PROPOSITION 10. *The coarse, repulsive, mediaeval doctrine of hell that was proclaimed for many centuries has been abandoned by most men as being out of harmony with the character of God as revealed in His Word.*

Men of God no longer preach that "the damned shall be packed like brick *in* a kiln, and be so bound that they cannot move a limb, nor even an eyelid; and while thus fixed, the Almighty shall blow the fires of hell through them forever." Neither do they preach that "the miser shall have molten gold poured down his throat," nor that "the drunkard shall have plenty of his cups, when scalding lead shall be poured down his throat, and his breath draw flames of fire instead of air." It is cause for thanksgiving that such declarations as these have been banished from the lips of men of good will. But the tragedy is that nothing that is truly Biblical has come in to take their place. If such sadistic ideas are not true, then just what is the truth of God concerning the nature of future punishment.

About all that men of today have to declare upon the subject of future punishment is a few generalities. These generalities are supported by passages in Scripture, but no serious attempt is made to honestly interpret or explain the passages. They do not dare to go into detail or to be plain-spoken in regard to the nature of future punishment. They take refuge behind an implication that this whole subject is so shrouded in mystery and that it belongs to the secret things of God. The result is that we find those who claim to be Bible-taught believers, yet they know nothing more about future punishment than the few generalities that are also known to the men of the world. The shame of such a state of affairs should drive every believer to the Word of God. The pagan ideas of future punishment should never have been allowed to defile the pure truth of God's Word. The wild, misguided sayings of men lost in the mazes of their own sadistic speculations should not be accepted as the truth from God's revelation.

The professing church is afraid to reexamine its beliefs in this important matter. Ministers are afraid to open up this subject for thought and discussion. They hold that the faith of many will be upset if the matter is reconsidered.

Must we admit that our faith in this matter is such a fragile flower that we fear lest the least wind of controversy should cause it to shed its delicate petals on the ground? What is behind all this fear of reopening this subject for reexamination and reinvestigation? Are we afraid that men will disfellowship us? Are we afraid of the name-callers who specialize in the uncharitable cry of "heretic" ? Are we afraid that our efforts will be misrepresented and misunderstood? Away with all such fears! The time has certainly come, even as in the days of Ezra, to open the Book.

PROPOSITION 11. *The teaching that the punishment of the unrighteous begins at the moment of death is a very serious blot on the justice of God.*

If this is the truth, then Cain, who died about six thousand years ago has already endured six millenniums of punishment, while another murderer who dies today begins to suffer today. Therefore, Cain will have to suffer six thousand years more for the same crime than the murderer who dies today.

If two men charged with identical crimes and equally guilty were sentenced, one for five years and the other for ten years, all men who love justice would cry out against such a miscarriage of justice. Shall we not also cry out against any teaching that insists that one man shall suffer six thousand years more than another for an identical crime? It is indeed a fearful travesty on truth to teach that men are tortured for their sins before they ever have their day in court, and that later they do have their day in court merely to receive a sentence that is determined beforehand. Would not this make the justice of the great white throne to be of the same character as the justice ordered by a Mexican general who said, "Give the man a fair trial, then shoot him." Can this be the justice of God? Can this be the teaching of the Word of God? Do you know that it is? Are you sure that it is? Or can it be that you just do not care?

PROPOSITION 12. *The contention that God's holiness is of such nature that His justice can never be satisfied by anything save eternal conscious suffering as the penalty for sins needs to be carefully examined.*

If this dogma is true, then this is the penalty Christ should have paid when He died for our sins. He paid the debt that we owed to God, but He did not suffer eternally. If the debt we owed was "eternal suffering" then that debt has never been paid. Jesus Christ suffered just six hours on the Cross. He did not suffer eternally.

If we would know of God's wrath against sin, we need to look at the Cross. We will learn from this that our God does punish sin, but we will also learn that the wages of sin is death and not eternal conscious torment.

Some have met this objection by saying that Christ being divine could bear an eternity of punishment in one great shock lasting just six hours. They also say that man being human could not stand this. But will those who think after this fashion tell

us what they think would happen to a human being if an eternity of punishment were visited upon him in six hours of time? Would it destroy him? Would it annihilate him? If so, would it not be better this way than that God should keep him in existence solely for the purpose of tormenting him eternally?

Furthermore, if eternal conscious suffering is the only penalty that will satisfy God, how then can **Isaiah 40:1-2** be true? Here the prophet says:

"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

In Conclusion

The twelve propositions that have been set forth are sufficient to demonstrate the imperative need for restudy and reexamination of the entire subject of man's nature and man's destiny. It would be easy to set forth a dozen more propositions that are just as pertinent to the matter under consideration. It has been the things set forth in these propositions that have kept me progressively studying the subject of human nature and human destiny for a period of twenty years. I now thank God that when He first exercised me concerning these subjects that grace was given me so that I did not seek to stop His work in my heart and mind. The study has indeed been a profitable spiritual experience. And even though the labor has continued for twenty years, I feel it has only begun. It will not be finished till my life's work is ended, and I fully expect to resume it in the life to come.

In this pamphlet I have not tried to set forth my findings. This has been written for the sole purpose of awakening others to the need of such a study. However, being a realist, and being fully cognizant of the manner in which the study of these subjects has long been held in contempt, I see no hope at present that the present generation of professed Bible students and teachers will take up the study of these subjects. Bible Conferences today avoid a study of these subjects as men would a pestilence or disease. If the people refuse to receive without question a certain creedal conception of man's nature and destiny, they are berated for refusing to accept the Word of God. Even though in many sermons they are exhorted to read and study the Bible, yet they are classed as heretics if they seek to discover what it has to say about the nature and duration of future punishment.

In this land we are free to study, free to speak, and free to believe. All men should avail themselves of this freedom. The next twenty-five years could well be spent by all students of the Word in pursuit of a true, accurate, and complete understanding of man's nature and man's destiny. If this were done, the next generation would have much truth for their portion as a heritage from us, and the million-and-one difficulties which have surrounded these subjects would, for the greater part, be cleared away.

My own labors in this field have resulted in certain conclusions, but this is not the place to set these forth. However, to avoid confusion and misunderstanding I would make the following statements:

After a most careful and exhaustive study of everyone of the 859 occurrences of the Hebrew and Greek words that mean "soul," I have never found any hint, or suggestion of any doctrine of soul sleep. No matter what my detractors may say, I do not believe in soul sleep. I do not even understand what men mean by this term.

I do not believe that the dead are either conscious or unconscious. These words can be applied only to the living. I believe that the dead are dead until they are resurrected.

I believe that whatever punishment the wicked dead receive at the great white throne will be eternal. It will never be altered or changed. I believe that the lake of fire is penal and not remedial.

I do not believe in any form of universal salvation, universal restoration, or universal reconciliation:

Some of the results of my studies concerning man's nature and destiny have been set forth in a series of eight pamphlets, some of which are already out of print. Since, in harmony with our principle of progressive study, nothing is reprinted apart from careful restudy and rewriting, the reissuing of these pamphlets will take considerable time. However, correspondence is welcomed concerning those titles which are now available.

My study of the Biblical facts concerning human nature and destiny have brought me much satisfaction. I know that I have gone to the Word of God to study with microscopic exactitude everything that has any bearing upon these subjects. Many of the facts I have found are difficult to understand. Therefore, I know I have not reached finality of truth. Everything I now hold is held subject to revision if further light should be granted me from the Word of God.

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