

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

Otis Q. Sellers, Bible Teacher

INTERPRETATION OF MATT. 10:28

Professing Christians who hold the Platonic theory as to the nature of man are quite firm in their belief that the soul is a detachable and separable part of man that lives on as a true and complete man after the body is dead. And most of these seem to find the greatest comfort and support for this theory in the words spoken by our Lord to His disciples when He said:

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Matt. 10:28.

This passage is said to declare the inherent immortality of the soul, its everlasting character, along with all the ideas that accompany the Greek body-soul dualism that arises out of such a belief. To the Platonist this verse declares that there is a detachable part of man that survives the death of the body, and that this part is the real and true man who is just as well off without a body as he is with one.

This interpretation can be easily and readily accepted by the superficial Bible reader who has never made a logical study of all the Biblical material that concerns the soul - a study that can be made by anyone who has access to an analytical concordance (Young's or Strong's). Even a cursory study will bring the conviction that the Hebrew word for soul is *nephesh*, and that this word is used interchangeably by the Holy Spirit with the Greek word *proche*, the word for "soul" in the New Testament. Compare Isa. 42:1 with Matt. 12:18; Deut. 6:5 with Matt. 22:37; and Psalm 16:10 with Acts 2:27. Thus in harmony with the law of divine interchange of Hebrew and Greek

words we can declare with full confidence that these two words are identical in meaning and of equal value.

In view of these facts we know that Matthew 10:28 is only one of the 859 passages in the Word of God that gives testimony in regard to the soul. And to borrow the phrasing of our Lord, we can properly say that one should not build his convictions on one occurrence of a word, but on every occurrence of that word that has proceeded from the mouth of God (See Matt. 4:4).

Whatever conclusions one may come to in regard to Matt. 10:28, whatever doctrine he may build upon it, or ideas he may seek to prove by it, all these must be in harmony with the great mass of divine truth given in the word of God concerning the soul, also in harmony with the Biblical definition given of it. The human soul is what the man became when God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (Gen. 2:7). We must reject flatly, firmly and once and for all any interpretation or use made of this passage which puts it into direct conflict with other clear passages. No interpretation can be accepted that makes Scripture to be contradictory and confusing.

Having made an assiduous study of the Hebrew word *nephesh* in all its occurrences, I have entered into certain truths that I can never forget, ignore, or lay aside. For example, it is positive truth that the Hebrew original of Lev. 24:17, 18 reads: "**He that killeth the soul of a man shall surely be put to death, and he that killeth the soul of a beast shall make it good, soul for soul.**"

The word *nephesh* is found four times in these two passages, but the *King James* translators well knew what an accurate rendering would do to their treasured Platonic philosophy, so they took care of the matter by ignoring two occurrences altogether and rendering the other two by the word "beast."

Any student can verify the 'fact that in Numbers 35:30 the Hebrew says: "**Whosoever killeth any soul, the murderer shall be put to death;**" and that Numbers 6:6 actually speaks of a "**dead soul**" (*muth nephesh*).

Thus it is crystal clear that the Spirit of God in the Old Testament speaks of men killing the soul, while in Matt. 10:28 it seems that the Lord Jesus speaks of men not being able to kill the soul. Therefore, on the principle of

mutual exclusivity, both of these ideas cannot be true; and I, for one, will not accept any understanding or interpretation of Matt. 10:28 that places Jesus Christ in the position of being in direct conflict with the Old Testament. For if man is not able to kill the soul, then the commandments of God with their severe penalties given in Lev. 24:17, 18 and Num. 35:30 make about as much sense as if our government should make it an offense punishable by death if anyone interferes with the rising of the sun in the morning.

As one who publicly professes to love the truth, to hold it, and to proclaim it, I would not be able to sleep at night if I set forth the interpretation of Matt. 10:28 that most men are giving today. Therefore, I, for one, must find an honest interpretation of this passage, one that will be in harmony with the definition of the soul given in Gen. 2:7, and it must also be one that will not make ridiculous the divine laws given in Lev. 24:17, 18, and Num. 35:30.

A comparison of this passage with the parallel passage in Luke's Gospel should be made. Luke gives an explanatory rendering of this passage in which the soul is not mentioned. There we read: "**And I say unto you My friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him, which after He hath killed hath power to cast into Gehenna; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him**" (Luke 12:4,5).

From this passage it seems clear that if the thrust of truth in Matthew 10:28 was to set forth "an immortal soul," or "a never-dying soul," or "an indestructible soul," as so many insist, this would not have been omitted by Luke. He would not cut the very heart out of this passage if "an immortal soul" is the heart of it.

This passage deals with whom the disciples shall not fear and Whom they shall fear. They are not to fear men who can kill only the body but cannot go beyond this, but they are to fear Him which after He has killed, can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. These words from the lips of our Lord are remarkable, inasmuch as they were spoken at a time when Greek philosophy taught that the true man was an eternal soul that could not die, could not be killed, and was indestructible. These ideas were almost universally held, and were so prestigious that the Greeks classified all men as barbarians who did not hold them.

This philosophy had permeated into the thinking of many in Israel, but our Lord negated this whole system of thought when He flew into the face of all Greeks who taught this and all in Israel who assented to it when He said: "Fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna." A soul that can be destroyed is certainly not eternal or immortal.

The *King James* translators, whose thinking had been deeply permeated by the Platonic philosophy, solved most problems of conflict by translating most of the Old Testament in harmony with their views. However, the man who has committed himself unalterably to the truth cannot allow himself any such liberties with the original words spoken by God. And, beyond all question, the commonly accepted interpretation and use made of Matt. 10:28 throws it into direct conflict with many clear passages in the Old Testament. To avoid this we must pay close attention to all the words that God has used. This will be the key that solves the problem of Matt. 10:28.

The New Testament word for "murder" is the verb *phoneuo*. From this is derived the noun *phoneus* which means a murderer. This verb has a fixed meaning as examination of its twelve occurrences will show. It is never used of a judicial killing, what we call "capital punishment."

Another word is *apokteino*, which is a more flexible word, but it is the word that is always used when a legal or judicial deprivation of life is in view. Its exact meaning is regulated by its context, and when the context supports it, it always means to put to death by judicial decree. See Matt. 16:21, John 16:2 and 18:31 as examples of this. The word *apokteino* is found twice in Matt. 10:28 and twice in Luke 12:4,5. With these facts in mind we will examine the context of this passage.

In the section that makes up Matt. 10: 16-28 it is plain that the Lord Jesus is looking far into the future, while at the same time He is applying His words to the immediate experiences of His disciples. He warns them concerning men who will deliver them up to the councils and scourge them in their synagogues, tells them that they will be brought before governors and kings for His sake, and that they would be hated and persecuted. But when and if this comes upon them they are not to cease their testimony. What He had told them in darkness, they were to speak in light; and what He had whispered in their ears, they were to proclaim from the housetops. And at no time were they to allow their actions to be shaped by the fear of men, not even the most powerful men. These can only kill the body, and afterward

have no more that they can do, But they are to fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.

Thus it is evident that the word "kill" in this passage has to do with the judicial sentencing of a man to death, so that by a legal process his life, his labors, his influence, and his testimony are all brought to an end. Such judges would probably rub their hands in glee, congratulate one another, and say: "A good work, that troublemaker is dead and done for!" But, we ask, is he? The answer has to be, "No, by no means." That man will be heard from again - not because he survived death, or that his soul lives on, but because of the great fact of resurrection from among the dead.

It is probable that the real key to the meaning of Matt. 10:28 is found in the fact that in Hebrew thought, the word "soul" regularly stands as a simple personal pronoun and is used in places where we would use I, *myself*, or *me*.

Our Lord was a Hebrew, not a Greek, and the men He spoke to were Hebrews. It is in harmony with this fact that we find the true meaning of His words in Matt. 10:28. The powerful rulers who would sentence the Lord's apostles to death could only bring them to an end as animated bodies, but they could not bring an end to the apostles themselves. Of all that the Father gave the Son He would lose nothing. Not because they were still living after having been killed, but because He would raise them up in the coming day (John 6:39).

This passage does not teach the Greek idea of a detachable and immortal soul. But it does declare a future life for one that evil judges thought was gone forever.

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