

BULLETIN

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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Otis Q. Sellers, Founder

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JANE SELLERS HANCOCK, EDITOR

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Updates from Rusty Hancock

It has been my fortune to be the grandson of Otis Q. Sellers. I was raised in the study and teachings of The Word of Truth Ministry. I have friends who know I attend a Bible Study class on a weekly basis. They ask me what church I attend and are surprised to hear that I have never been a member of a church. Other than a wedding or a funeral, I have never attended any service inside a church. It baffles them that I can be a "Christian" without attending an organized church. I try to explain being a "Christian Individualist," but it is rarely understood.

One of the greatest joys in my position with The Word of Truth Ministry is the correspondence I have with people on our mailing list. I get to learn their stories of how they found the Truth and what it means in their lives. But I also learn how difficult a decision it was for many of them to openly express their views of the Truth that they had discovered. This occasionally led to being ostracized by their church peers and friends. It takes a strong and principled individual to withstand social rejection for upholding a Truth. Others still attend their local churches because of the fellowship with other Christians and longstanding friendships, but do not challenge any misleading or false doctrines. They hold their Truths to themselves to avoid confrontation with church leaders and any negative repercussions that may occur.

I will never have to experience that dilemma. But, I also have no knowledge of the "other side of the coin." Often during our weekly studies I will ask, "How does mainstream Christianity interpret what we just discussed?" Recently our small study group has been reviewing the story of "the Rich Man and Lazarus" (Luke 16). You are all familiar with my grandfather's excellent booklet on the subject. But when I looked into the "mainstream Christianity" views of the satire, it was my turn to be surprised. Many attributed this story as factual supporting the existence of man's destination being Heaven or Hell. Another emphasized that its main basis was that "neglecting the poor is a damnable sin." And yet another allowed the rich to be admitted into the Kingdom of God, but said they would find it difficult to adjust to not having their wealth. I could go on, and on, and on.

The Rich Man and Lazarus is just one example. My lack of knowledge of other beliefs often comes up during

my studies as I try to understand how certain churches, or denominations, express a view that cannot be based on the facts, or Truth, as set forth in the Bible. Several are due to inaccurate Scriptural translations, some to erroneous Platonic Theory, and others to embedded church rituals and practices.

This is why I appreciate it when a Bible teacher will explain how a misguided opinion is developed or advanced. Enclosed in this mailing are two new issues of *More Seed and Bread*: "Three Strikes and Mid-Acts Is Out," written by Candice Davis, and "Interrogating Luke 16," written by Andrew Brown. Both of these teachers reveal the "other side of the coin." These leaflets state the other opinion and ask questions regarding that opinion. Not that I care to embrace a false doctrine, but it helps me to understand how, and why, an individual would hold onto beliefs that just are not factual. If I can better understand their frames of mind, I can be more effective in discussions or debates surrounding a particular topic.

During our Bible studies I enjoy playing the role of "Devil's Advocate." After reading a passage and realizing that it can be interpreted several different ways, I find it fascinating to dig deep and search for the correct meaning. I openly challenge, and sometimes disagree with, my fellow students. This is not confrontational but is essential for seeking out and defining the Truth. My grandfather changed his views and opinions on several subjects (especially in his early writings in the 1930s). He would say that you should always refer to his most recent writings because over the years he may have found new Truths in developing his opinions.

Rightfully dividing the Word of God can be a challenge. Being a progressive Bible student can be a challenge. Our challenge is to encourage each other to "keep moving the ball forward." We may not necessarily agree on each opinion expressed, but we are reaching out with our objective being the Truth. Some things are just not understood yet. Some Truths may still be discovered in the Bible, or we may just have to wait until that wonderful day when the Kingdom comes and we are enlightened by God. The Kingdom cannot come soon enough.

*"Your Word is a lamp to my feet and
a light to my path."* Psalm 119:105, NKJV

God's Word About Soul

Nathan C. Johnson

In the Christian world much is made of the concept of the "soul." Many beliefs critical to orthodoxy are based on beliefs regarding the soul. The number one definition of "soul" found on dictionary.com is "the principle of life, feeling, thought, and action in humans, regarded as a distinct entity separate from the body, and commonly held to be separable in existence from the body; the spiritual part of humans as distinct from the physical part." Since dictionary.com goes on to list thirteen other definitions of the word "soul," it is clear that any study of this word is bound to be a complicated one.

Most Christians believe just this: that the soul is a "person inside the person" and that it can be separated from the body. Yet the *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary* definition of the word "soul," which focuses instead on the Hebrew word *nephesh* and the Greek word *psuche*, starts to reveal that the commonly-held view and the Bible are in fact at odds. *Baker's* states, "'Nepes' (*nephesh*) in the Old Testament is never the 'immortal soul' but simply the life principle or living being. . . . Clearly, then, in the Old Testament a mortal is a living soul rather than having a soul." According to *Baker's*, the commonly-held view regarding the soul does not match up with what is found in the Bible. Who is right? Only a study of the Scriptures themselves can decide.

1. Genesis 1:20 (*New King James Version* throughout) is the first occurrence of the Hebrew word for soul, *nephesh*. "Then God said, 'Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens.'" Here, "living creatures" is the Hebrew *chay nephesh*, which might be translated as "living souls." When we combine this with the occurrences of *nephesh* in Genesis 1:21 (thing), 1:24 (creature), and 1:30 (life), we can lock in one definition of soul: any creature of the land, sea, or air.

2. Genesis 2:7 provides us with a second definition of the word "soul." "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 being." "Being" here is the Hebrew *nephesh* or "soul." This verse demonstrates that *Baker's* was quite right: a man is a living soul rather than having one. Our second definition of the soul, then, is what man is as a product of his body and his breath of life being mixed together.

3. Genesis 9:4 gives us our third Biblical definition of the soul. "But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood." "Life" is the Hebrew *nephesh*. This statement makes the life and the blood equivalent. Genesis 9:5 does the same, noting that "lifeblood" should be "soulblood,"

and "life of man" should be "soul of man."

It is important to know that *nephesh* is THE Hebrew word for "soul," though we have not yet come on it translated as such. There is no question about this; no other word might be substituted. If this word does not mean "soul," then souls are not mentioned in the Old Testament.

4. Genesis 12:5 provides a fourth definition for "soul." "Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan." "People" here is *nephesh*, so people can simply be referred to as "souls." See Genesis 14:21, 17:14, 36:6, 46:15, 18, 22, 25-27 for other examples of this.

5. Genesis 12:13 uses "soul" yet another way. "Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you." "That I may live" in Hebrew is "that my soul may live." It is clear that Abraham meant that "me myself" might live. So the "soul" sometimes merely refers to the self. Genesis 49:6 is another clear example of this.

6. Genesis 23:8 provides another definition of "soul" that is perhaps a departure from what we have seen so far. "And he spoke with them, saying, 'If it is your wish that I bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and meet with Ephron the son of Zohar for me.'" Here, "wish" is the word for "soul," *nephesh*. This shows that the soul can also have to do with the wishes, the desires, or ultimately the emotions. The aspect of man that means he is an emotional being with certain longings that can be satisfied and fulfilled is called in Scripture "soul." We can see this as well in Genesis 34:3, 8 and 42:21.

These six definitions of the word "soul" will serve as a foundation for understanding God's teaching about the soul throughout the Bible. (At seedandbread.org see SS17, *What Is the Soul?* by Otis Q. Sellers for a more in-depth study of the soul.) Yet one important truth might be added to them if we would extend our study beyond Genesis. Leviticus 19:28 states, "You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the LORD." "The dead" translates *nephesh* here. So a word that we have seen earlier translated as "life" is here translated as "the dead"! Leviticus 21:11 will help explain to us how this can be so, as it says of the Aaronic priests: "nor shall he go near any dead body, nor defile himself for his father or his mother." The Hebrew here is *muth nephesh* or "dead soul." Thus the soul, which can be a "living soul" (Genesis 2:7), can also

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Today's Challenge

By Andrew Brown

Miscommunication happens frequently: just ask my friends. Written communication has more potential for disconnect without visual or audible clues. Punctuation and capitalization help fill the gaps of writing. Yet the Bible's original language did not contain punctuation at all! The original Greek manuscripts did not even contain spaces. The punctuation translators have added is helpful, but is not divinely inspired. Of course, all languages contain words that express passion. Such as (in English) "behold," "lo," or "alas." "Today" is a word in the Hebrew culture that added an emotional emphasis.

"Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (*Heb. 4:7 NASB throughout*). David (*Psa. 95*) spoke this of the Israelites' wanderings, and the Spirit quoted it in Hebrews. One should never harden one's heart to God's voice (God's Word). The use of "today" (or "this day") was not drawing attention to a particular day, but was an exclamation drawing attention to the importance of the call. The use of "today" is not marking out a twenty-four-hour day; rather it puts solemn emphasis on the sentence, drawing the reader's notice! Similarly, the Lord would say, "I am telling you the truth." We know every word from His mouth is truth. This exclamation grabbed His hearer's attention.

The book of Deuteronomy demonstrates this point. There, this phrase occurs forty-two times. "Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other" (*Deut. 4:39*). This is ALWAYS true, not just that day. Today emphasizes what is being said. "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully" (*Deut. 5:1*). This statement was true since the giving of the law; they needed to continue heeding it. Today lays the foundation of these solemnly important statements. The inclusion of today cues the reader into an emphatic statement, an important emotional plea.

The customary use of today for emphasis was exercised by Israelites throughout Scripture. Joab's rebuke of David after mourning the death of his rebellious son Absalom reveals this. "Today you have covered with shame the faces of all your servants, who today have saved your life . . . For you have shown today that princes and servants are nothing to you; for I know this day that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased" (*2 Sam. 19:5-6*). Does not this Bible verse burst with greater power and understanding through this knowledge? A few other examples where the Bible records the use of this Hebraism

include: King Saul (*1 Sam. 18:21*), David (*1 Sam. 21:5*), Ahimelech (*1 Sam. 22:13*), and Elijah (*1 Kings 18:36*).

This Hebraism continues into the New Testament as can be seen in Hebrews 4, and is used by Paul in Acts 20:26; 26:2. But most notably, it is seen in Jesus' words on the cross. Jesus was talking to another Israelite in the world's darkest moment when mankind killed the Creator, God Himself, the Savior of the world. In the midst of this darkness, blasphemy, and ridicule, a thief spoke out in faith: "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom." And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (*Luke 23:42-43*). All the hopes and dreams of Israel were hanging on nails. In response to a criminal's faithful statement, the Lord spoke this emphasis of reassurance and life using this common Hebraism.

That verse in that powerful scene is often misrepresented as a statement that the soul is immortal and the thief was going to be ushered into bliss at the moment of his death. Platonists ignore the problems this interpretation brings and misrepresent the use of today. The Lord's assurance of Paradise was in reference to the thief's request for the Kingdom. He was not talking about Heaven, or the erroneous Pharisaic doctrine of "Abraham's bosom." Consider that the Lord had declared He would be in the earth for three days and three nights (*Matt. 12:40*) and, after He was resurrected, He told Mary, "I have not yet ascended to My Father" (*John 20:17*). The answer to this puzzle is simple. The comma is misplaced and today means more than we often consider.

Since the original Greek uses no commas, human translators have added punctuation. They misinterpreted adding the comma before today when it should be after. This is NOT the Scriptural precedent. "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, . . . (*Deut. 4:26*). "So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, . . . (*Deut. 4:40*). "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart" (*Deut. 6:6*). Examples are too numerous to include.

The passage would be punctuated better, "Truly I say to you today, you shall be with Me in Paradise." The solemn importance conveyed should be noticed. In the darkness of sin, faith shines bright to God. As He died, even for the sin of the criminals punished next to Him, the Lord rewarded the faithful declaration of a dying convict with a promise. When the Kingdom comes to earth, that thief will be resurrected to enjoy life in Paradise. His resurrection is secure. You have heard this truth today! Will

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Thoughts on Otis Q. Sellers' 'The Rich Man and Lazarus'

By M.B. Hammond

This abstract, based on the 48-page booklet *The Rich Man and Lazarus* by the late Otis Q. Sellers, published in 1962, is a complete study of Christ's suppositional story spoken to the Pharisees and His disciples. It covers the passage in Luke 16:19-31 completely, as well as the preceding satires of "the lost sheep," "the lost coin," "the prodigal son" and "the unjust steward" (Luke 15:4-16:18). Christ hurled these particular stories at the Pharisees because of their great love for money and complete lack of compassion for the poor of Israel. These are some of the truest satires found in literature.

Sellers starts his discussion by saying that Luke 16:19-31 is certainly not the most important passage in the Word of God. But to many people this portion becomes pre-eminent because of the great number of doctrines founded upon it and established by it. Since this passage is appealed to over and over again, it becomes more important because of its use in supporting so many beliefs, even though this is an isolated passage having no other corroborating Scripture. Support for the commonly-held belief of the self-styled orthodox belief regarding man's nature and destiny is developed from this portion.

An analysis of the 859 occurrences of the word for "soul" in Scripture makes it clear that the "soul" is the product of the body God has given and the spirit into which God has breathed. The truth of the Bible is that man is "soul," while the Platonic Theory, which passes for scholarship, claims man has a "soul." The story of the Rich Man and Lazarus is used to show that after man dies the soul (disembodied?) goes on to live some other place. By way of background, the Catholic Church concocted up two compartments and called one "Hell" (*Hades*), a burning permanent place for bad people, and the other one "Purgatory," a temporary or intermediate place for dead people. And lastly, Heaven is where good people went, ostensibly as beings with floating spirits. For those religions that employ the concept of life after death, man does not have a "soul" but is a "soul." Unfortunately for those who employ the Luke 16:19-31 passage, the word "soul" *does not* appear anywhere in it. "Death" is *not* "life"—it is a return; the "body" or "dead soul" returns to dust and the spirit which was in that person goes back to God Who gave it (Eccl. 12:7); that "soul" is dead. No place in Scripture is the concept of an "immortal soul" presented, and to use RMAL passage to suggest such a thing is a flagrant promotion of error. Nevertheless, in Roman times it was so deeply ingrained in their philosophy that even the Pharisees taught this error to the Jewish people. The Biblical meaning of the Greek word *Hades* is what Sellers called "the state of death" with resurrection in view.

The passage under examination begins by saying: (19)

"There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: (20) And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, (21) and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores" (Luke 16:19-21). We note that the rich man is not called vile or sinful. The description here simply says that he was rich, wore expensive clothes and lived luxuriously every day. This is all we know about him. The facts reveal only his condition or state of being and nothing at all about his character. It is clear that he was content to dwell at ease. Now the poor man, Lazarus, is certainly in desperate need. He is not, however, portrayed as a godly or devout man. Instead he is set forth as a beggar, afflicted all over his body with ulcerating sores, but nothing more is revealed except that the dogs licked his sores. Not a single fact brings forth admiration or a compliment. No evidence exists that he prayed to God for his needs: in fact he appears to have depended on the rich man for his sustenance. His condition may arouse our sympathy, but that is all we can say. We see nothing in his life worthy of emulation, and thus we conclude that there is no place in this description for the righteous to be contrasted with the wicked, unless the thought is that all the rich are wicked and all the poor are righteous, but this is not the message of the Bible.

The next portion says: (22) *"And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; (23) And in hell (Hades) he lift up his eyes being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom" (Luke 16:22-23).* We are told that they each died, and the story relates that the poor man is transported by the angels into "Abraham's bosom." Let us be sure to note that this is the first and only reference to "Abraham's bosom" in Scripture. Therefore it is hard to know exactly to what it refers. If it were a name for "Heaven" or "Paradise," why would it not be used again somewhere else in Scripture: you might even wonder what it was called for the 2,000 years before Abraham's time? Even the superficial student must admit that there is something strange about this term with its sole appearance in this passage. We are also told that the rich man died and was buried. It goes on to describe that in *Hades* he lifted up his eyes, being in torment. His sufferings occur as he sees Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom. Since the story relates that the rich man saw and spoke with them, they must have been close enough to see and carry on a conversation with him. The question is, if the rich

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Thoughts on 'The Rich Man and Lazarus'

man in *Hades* could see them in bliss and Lazarus and Abraham could see him being tormented, then how could they, as decent people, be supremely happy seeing this? Just hearing the tormented man begging for water would cause extreme distress to sensitive people. One would have to be very callused to enjoy this scene in any way. No wonder people using this for doctrine to substantiate man's destiny wanted to transport the good people to Heaven right away, so that *Hades* would only be the place of the bad people. It would be sadistic to enjoy seeing such torment and not to desire to alleviate some of the suffering.

The passage goes on as follows: (24) *"And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. (25) But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivest thy good things, and likewise, Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted and thou art tormented. (26) And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence"* (Luke 16:24-26).

Thus the conversation begins with the rich man pleading with Father Abraham to have mercy on him. We ask: "Why Abraham? Was he the chief man there? Was water being withheld from the rich man as punishment? Did Lazarus have a finger to dip in the water, and did the rich man, as a disembodied soul, really have a tongue to cool with the water? Why did the rich man not appeal to God for mercy?" Abraham does not charge him with idolatry, oppressing the poor, being a robber, or a persecutor of widows and orphans. The only charge Abraham levels in his reply is that the rich man had his good things in his lifetime so he is now going to be tormented. Abraham's statement can only mean that in death the positions of the rich and poor are to be reversed for the life to come. This is not the message of any other Scriptural passage; so why is it here? The answer lies in the fact that the Jewish nation had only two social classes in Christ's day: the rich and the poor. It was a tightly closed caste system that could not be revoked. And the Pharisees used this ridiculous teaching to keep the poor in their place, and to avoid a public revolt. The Pharisees taught that the poor would have their position reversed in the life to come, for then they, the rich, would also have their position reversed. *Christ took their one-sided teaching and made it consistent, which is the key to the satire.* Any reader who is instructed in the Word of God will understand that the possession of good things or lack thereof has no bearing on God's judgment for the life to come, *for our relationship to God is what counts.* This ridiculous teaching, if it were true, would make man's

future blessings to depend on present poverty which is *not* the message of Christ.

It is puzzling that Abraham would speak this way, since he had been a very rich man himself. His life had been filled with good things and even personal dealings with God. Does not his denial of a few drops of water for another rich man seem absurd, especially in view of his own complicity in being rich? Here in these verses we have the rich man's plea that was refused on the grounds that (1) there were previous good things he had possessed, and (2) the impossibility of crossing that vast chasm between the rich and poor classes. The plea is that there is a chasm between them. The rich protected themselves by means of this chasm. Those who desired to cross from one side to the other, as well as vice versa, were blatantly prohibited. This is a key attribute of the sarcasm.

In the next passage the conversation goes on: (27) *Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldst send him to my father's house: (28) For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come to this place of torment. (29) Abraham said unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. (30) And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. (31) And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead* (Luke 16:27-31). After the first refusal, the rich man made the plea to Abraham that Lazarus be sent to his father's house to testify to his five brothers, lest they should come to this same place of torment when they die. Abraham explains that they had Moses and the prophets, and they should hear them. But the rich man objects: this is not sufficient; they require more, saying they would believe if one returns from the dead. Abraham refutes this, with the underlying reference pointing to Christ's death and resurrection at the Pharisees' hands.

The key factors about this story that should be noted are: (1) It is a clever satirical story pushing the false teachings of the Pharisees back in their faces; (2) it contains no hint of God, with no one representing God or Christ in the story; (3) there is no great sinner in it, nor is there a great saint; (4) it contains no message of repentance, salvation or any description of how man is justified before God; (5) its only "doctrine" is in fact repugnant to every revelation of God's righteous dealings with mankind; (6) it puts Abraham in the convoluted position of conversing with the rich man in the place of torment where he (Abraham) should have been also.

Sellers concluded that "this story is not 'the gospel'; that this satirical story was aimed at the sneering unbelieving, self-righteous Pharisees," and also when this story is "handled rightly it still carries a powerful message to all such today."

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God's Word About Soul

die and be a "dead soul." This is true of both man and animals, both of whom have blood and are souls.

We can examine the Bible from front to back, and the Platonic idea of an immortal, separable part of man called the "soul" cannot be found there. The word "soul" has multiple meanings. We have found six of them. Yet all are mortal and can die. This is the Biblical truth regarding the "soul."

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Today's Challenge

your faith shine in this eon's darkness? Let us stand with Joshua's emphatic declaration, "*Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*" (Josh. 24:15). Amen.

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 we may get a hotel slot.
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rustywofit@aol.com.)
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Speakers featured:
Nathan C. Johnson,
Andrew Brown and Robert Juneau,
 and possibly
Milton B. Hammond.

**Stay tuned for more information
 in the next Bulletin!**

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We hope to see you all there!