

Immortality and the second death

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There are many good reasons to reject the popular Christian teaching that those who die without first becoming Christians will suffer forever in a conscious state in a place called the lake of fire, and over the years I've written about a number of them (please see my much longer Bible study titled "*What the Bible really says about heaven, hell, judgement, death, evil, sin, and salvation*" for many of them), but one very good reason to reject it (at least for those who read Scripture literally) is what the Bible teaches about immortality.

Most people assume that salvation is about avoiding never-ending torment in the lake of fire after we die, and going to a place called "heaven" after we die instead. That's not what salvation is about at all, however, or even close to what Scripture teaches (while missing out on the lake of fire is a benefit some people gain from a certain type of salvation, it's not what salvation actually refers to in Scripture).

As I discussed in that aforementioned longer Bible study, Scripture teaches that there are different types of salvation (simply put, the word "salvation" doesn't always mean the same thing in every passage of Scripture, and unless you think being saved in whatever way it is you believe that Jesus saves us today is the exact same sort of salvation that Peter¹ and the rest of Jesus' disciples experienced² when they were saved from drowning, that it's the same sort of salvation the Israelites experienced when they were saved from Egyptian

¹ And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. — Matthew 14:28-30

² And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. — Matthew 8:24-25

slavery,³ or that women are required to give birth⁴ in order to experience that sort of salvation, I trust you agree that the words “salvation,” “save,” and “saved” have different meanings in different parts of Scripture, and that there are various different types, and perhaps even stages, of salvation; and while not everyone experiences every type or stage of salvation, all humans will experience at least one form of salvation, as also demonstrated in that longer Bible study), and the final stage of salvation is the physical experience of the salvation we’ve been promised because of what Christ accomplished through His death for our sins, burial, and resurrection on the third day,⁵ and is referred to in the *King James Version* of the Bible as being quickened.⁶

Being quickened (sometimes also referred to as being vivified, depending on your Bible translation) simply refers to having our mortal bodies being made immortal⁷ as happened to Jesus after His resurrection,⁸ being “*made alive*”⁹

³ Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. — Exodus 14:30

⁴ Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety. — 1 Timothy 2:15

⁵ Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: — 1 Corinthians 15:1-4

⁶ I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; — 1 Timothy 6:13

⁷ But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. — Romans 8:11

⁸ For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: — 1 Peter 3:18

⁹ For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. — 1 Corinthians 15:22

beyond the reach of death,¹⁰ which means being incapable of dying,¹¹ as well as never being subject to the corruption¹² and the humiliation of mortality ever again,¹³ and happens for those of us in the body of Christ at the time we ascend into heaven, after we've been physically resurrected into still very physical human bodies in this same physical universe we currently reside in (presuming we've died before Christ comes for His body, of course; those people in the body of Christ who haven't died when this occurs will simply be quickened and caught up to heaven without dying).

Contrary to popular opinion, those of us in the body of Christ don't go to heaven after we die (at least not prior to being resurrected and quickened), because heaven is not a place the dead can go (not in a conscious state, anyway; technically, yes, dead bodies can go there, but they don't remain there very long, and they don't know they're there). Instead, Scripture makes it clear that heaven exists here in the same physical universe and three dimensions that the earth exists in, although that's a discussion for another Bible study.

Now, yes, it is true that those of us who get the special salvation¹⁴ on top of the general salvation that Christ won for all of us through His death for our sins

¹⁰ So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? — 1 Corinthians 15:54-55

¹¹ Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. — Hebrews 7:16

¹² For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. — 1 Corinthians 15:53

¹³ Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. — Philippians 3:21

¹⁴ For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe. — 1 Timothy 4:10

and His subsequent burial and resurrection will indeed go live in heaven, but that won't happen until *after* the dead in Christ have been resurrected into physical, living, human bodies that are now immortal, and after the rest of the members of the body of Christ who are still living at that time have been quickened as well. It isn't said that we shall "*ever be with the Lord*" until that time¹⁵ (if we actually went to heaven right after we died, it would be said that we shall "*ever be with the Lord*" from the point of our death instead).

In fact, part of the reason Paul wrote the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians was to explain that resurrection isn't simply a figurative reference to some "spiritual," ethereal existence for ghosts, but rather that Christ was — and those of us who die will be — physically resurrected as human beings in living human bodies here in this same physical universe you're currently reading this post in, and he goes on to explain that "*this mortal must put on immortality*" at some point,¹⁶ meaning our physical human bodies will also eventually be quickened (although

¹⁵ But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. — 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

¹⁶ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? — 1 Corinthians 15:53-55

each in their own order¹⁷). This is referring to our physical human bodies (some of which have never died, and some belonging to those who have been resurrected from the dead) being transformed into glorified, immortal bodies so that they can never die again, at which point one can say they've finally experienced salvation physically.

Simply put, when it comes to humans, immortality is connected entirely with salvation, and is always considered to be a blessing and never a curse (and is ultimately connected to Christ's destruction of death). When a human has been made immortal, they have reached the final stage of their salvation. And this fact is a very definitive proof that nobody can suffer forever in the lake of fire.

But how can I say that? Doesn't Scripture teach that dead non-Christians will be cast into the lake of fire to suffer forever and ever? Well, no, it actually doesn't say anything of the sort. First of all, no humans are cast into the lake of fire until after they've been physically resurrected for the Great White Throne Judgement (*"But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were*

¹⁷ For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all. — 1 Corinthians 15:22-28

finished,” as John wrote,¹⁸ at which point they’ll be resurrected so they can be judged). This isn’t a judgement of ghosts in some ethereal afterlife realm; it takes place in our physical universe, and it’s biological, mortal, human beings who have been resurrected to be judged. Why do I say they’re mortal? Well, we know they aren’t resurrected to immortality since immortality is a result of experiencing the final stage of salvation, and if they’ve reached that point they definitely aren’t going to be hurt by the lake of fire.¹⁹ Which means that anyone who is cast into the lake of fire after this judgement has not been made immortal yet. And what happens to biological, mortal, human beings who are set on fire? They simply burn up and die (this is why the lake of fire is referred to as the second death, by the way, because it’s where certain mortal humans will die a second time). And there’s nothing in the text to indicate that God will keep resurrecting them over and over again each time they die (which would mean the lake of fire isn’t just the second death, but also the third and four and fifth deaths, and so-on-and-so-forth), so there’s no basis for the idea that

¹⁸ But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog, and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. — Revelation 20:5-15

¹⁹ He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death. — Revelation 2:11

anyone will suffer without end in the lake of fire. At most, if one wants to argue that the lake of fire is the final word on the matter for non-Christians, all they can argue is that some people will burn up and cease to exist permanently, but what you've just read should make it obvious that never-ending torment is an untenable doctrine. (Although those of us in the body of Christ are aware of the fact that Paul saw farther into the future than John did, and foresaw a time when even those in the lake of fire would be resurrected again — this time to immortality — but that's a whole other discussion.)

Of course, there's also nothing in the text to indicate that any human will be conscious in the lake of fire anyway. Only the beast, the false prophet, and the devil are said to be conscious in the lake of fire,²⁰ and they can be conscious because they're spiritual beings who are not mortal like we humans are prior to our quickening (the beast and false prophet in this verse would have to refer to beings who possess mortal humans who will die at the time Jesus returns to the earth, those mortal humans being two men who are also given those figurative titles during the Tribulation). Yes, there are a number of passages in other parts of Scripture which seem to indicate that people might suffer some sort of conscious punishment in the future, but these passages have to be interpreted in light of the above facts that you've just read, which means that they have to be referring to forms of judgement *other* than what most Christians have commonly assumed they're talking about (I explained what they are referring to in that longer Bible study I mentioned earlier, if you are curious, as well as in my shorter "*What the Hinnom?*" and "*What is death?*" studies).

²⁰ And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. — Revelation 20:10

I know all that was probably new for many people reading this, so let's break it down in a point-by-point recap:

- Immortality for humans is always connected with salvation in Scripture (only those who are finally experiencing salvation physically — in living bodies, with most of them having been resurrected from the dead first — will have “*put on immortality*,” or will have been made immortal, and whenever someone is made immortal it can then be said, “*O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*”, as far as they're concerned, because death will have been swallowed up in victory for them).
- Those who are going to be resurrected for the Great White Throne Judgement haven't experienced salvation yet, so they'll be raised as regular, mortal, biological humans.
- Mortal humans who are set on fire burn up and die.
- There's absolutely nothing in Scripture that tells us God will keep resurrecting people in the lake of fire perpetually so they can die over and over again without end after they've died a second time, and to insist that He will is quite clearly eisegesis, since there's just nothing in the text that even implies it. (This also means that those Christians who have tried to deny a second resurrection of those who will die a second time in the lake of fire so they can be quickened, by telling me, “Scripture doesn't specifically say the words, “Those who die a second time in the lake of fire will also be resurrected a second time so they can be made immortal,” can't then turn around and say, “There's a second and third and forth resurrection, and so-on-and-so-forth, so humans can suffer without end,” since they've already denied that a second resurrection will take place.)