



IMMORTAL LIFE

Reading: John 3

Mortality and immortality

God formed Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life, and so the first man became a living creature. But Adam sinned and so became a dying creature because the punishment for sin is death (Romans 6:23). We are all mortal (dying creatures) because we are descended from Adam and like him we too have sinned (Romans 5:12). God does not allow sinners to live for ever.

The life we now enjoy is soon over. It is likened to a vapour or mist:

“What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes” (James 4:14).

By contrast, God is immortal. Psalm 90 tells us that God is *“from everlasting to everlasting”*. This means that God has always existed and always will. We cannot understand this as we are bound by time. Psalm 90 contrasts God’s nature with man’s:

GOD’S ENDLESS NATURE (PSALM 90:2)	MAN’S DYING NATURE (PSALM 90:10)
Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.	The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.

1 Timothy 6:15,16 says that God:

*“is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, **who alone has immortality**, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen”*.

These verses seem to say that the Lord God is the only immortal being, but we know that Jesus conquered sin and is now immortal. Also, the angels do not die (Luke 20:35,36). The verses quoted above are really saying that God is the only **source** of immortality. He is the only One who has always existed and who can give immortality to others. He raised Jesus from the dead and gave him immortality. The angels have their immortality from God. Apart from God, only the Lord Jesus Christ and the angels are now immortal.

The good news is that it is possible for us to become immortal, through the saving work of Jesus. We read that he *“abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”* (2 Timothy 1:10).

Immortal life is not for everybody

The promise of life for evermore is made only to those who respond to God’s love. We all have a choice:

*“He (God) will render (give) to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing **seek for glory and honour and immortality**, he will give eternal life; but for those who are **self-seeking** and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil ... but glory and honour and peace for everyone who does good ...”* (Romans 2:6-10).

If we seek our own desires rather than immortality, then there is no hope of a future life.

Immortal life is God’s gift. None of us, however good we are, deserves it. As sinners, the best we can expect is to enjoy some of the benefits of life on this planet for about 70 or 80 years at the most. So unless we have the Bible hope of immortal life in Jesus Christ we will go to the grave, corrupt to dust and not share the blessings of God’s future kingdom on earth.





All the great Bible characters who believed God's promises had this hope. Paul and John, like other apostles, looked forward to eternal life (Titus 1:1,2; 1 John 2:25). Hebrews 11 lists many Old Testament people of faith who looked forward to a better time to come in the future.

Immortal life will be given by Jesus Christ to the faithful at the judgement that follows the resurrection from the dead. Jesus said:

*“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him **should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day**” (John 6:39,40).*

The “*last day*” will be when Christ Jesus returns:

*“For the Son of Man (Jesus) is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and **then** he will repay each person according to what he has done” (Matthew 16:27).*

The apostle Paul wrote of his hope:

*“Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also **to all who have loved his appearing**” (2 Timothy 4:8).*

Eternal life, everlasting life and immortality

The phrases ‘eternal life’ and ‘everlasting life’ come from the same Greek word and so mean the same. The phrase ‘eternal life’ is slightly different from the idea of immortality.

- Immortality is God's gift of endless life. It is the opposite of our present dying state of mortality (1 Corinthians 15:53).
- The phrase ‘eternal life’ refers to the quality of life that will be lived by true believers when they are made immortal. It contains the idea of ‘life of the age to come’.

When the Lord Jesus Christ returns, true believers will be given a place in God's kingdom and be made immortal. Their minds will also be changed to become completely free from sin and temptation and filled only with the ways and principles of God. Then they will truly know God and live in perfect harmony with Him. This is what the Bible means by eternal life – it is a quality of life that shows God's wonderful character, the type of life that the Lord Jesus showed us.

Although we do not have immortality now, there is a sense in which believers can have eternal life now. Just before he died, Jesus prayed:

*“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And **this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent**” (John 17:1-3).*

These verses show that those who choose to fill their thoughts and minds with the things of God in this life can be described as having eternal life now. So if we live in harmony with God and the Lord Jesus now, it can be said of us that:

*“God **gave us** eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (1 John 5:11).*

If we continue to live in this truly godly way, God by His grace will reward us with immortality and we will live for ever in perfect harmony with Him. So the life we will then enjoy will be both eternal and immortal. But if we do not seek to know God and practise the qualities of eternal life now by following the example of the Lord Jesus, then God will not give us immortality when the Lord Jesus returns. This shows how important it is to make every effort to leave the ways and thinking of the world and set our minds on the things of God.

There is a difference between knowing about God and knowing God. Only by reading and prayerfully thinking about the message of the Bible can we come to know and truly love God. We must do this to have eternal life.





The saints

Sin **separates** us from God. God is pure and righteous and so totally **separate** from the thinking, desires, ambitions and ways of all men and women. In this way God is holy ('separate' or 'set apart'). If we want to be God's children we must **separate** ourselves from the thinking and evil practices of the world around us – we must try to be holy like God Himself:

"As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" (1 Peter 1:14-16).

On the first day of creation God separated light from darkness. The Bible uses light to represent God's ways and darkness to represent sin (1 John 1:5-7). We should try to be as far from sin as light is from darkness:

*"The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then **let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarrelling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires**"* (Romans 13:12-14).

The Bible word 'saint' means 'holy'. It is used to describe true believers because in their lives they **separate** themselves from the evil influences of the world around them and show the qualities of eternal life now. The apostle Paul often described believers in this way:

*"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To **the saints** who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus"* (Ephesians 1:1).

See also Acts 9:13, Acts 26:10 and Philippians 4:21. Saints are not people who are given this title by church leaders.

A saint is a true believer

'Saint' means 'holy', 'separate' or 'set apart'. True believers are not like the people in the world. Instead they try to be godly and like the Lord Jesus.

True believers are also called saints because when Christ returns they will be made immortal and so be **separate** from the mortal population of God's kingdom. The saints will teach the mortal people God's ways. They will also rule the world with Christ as members of his government. They will rule with righteousness, wisdom and authority, and the world's problems will be solved.

Human governments are not able to solve the world's problems. There are many reasons for this. For example, world leaders and officials:

- are not always honest or righteous
- sometimes put their own interests before those of others
- are not wise enough to solve the evils of today's world
- often do not have the resources or authority to carry out their plans
- sometimes manage to make useful progress, but then become old or ill, and eventually die.

The saints who are given immortal life will be unable to sin, and will not change or weaken. They will rule with Christ in God's kingdom with wisdom and justice.

What will the immortal saints look like?

Many wonder what the saints (faithful believers) will look like when they have been made immortal. Will they be recognisable? Although we do not know all the details, the Bible does give us some information on the matter.





After his resurrection, the Lord Jesus had a body and the disciples were allowed to touch him. It is true that there were moments when they wondered if he were some sort of spirit, when he appeared miraculously in front of them. But he told them:

*“See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have **flesh and bones** as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39).*

It is clear that the Lord Jesus, now possessing immortality, had a body of “*flesh and bones*”. The record does not say that he had flesh and **blood**, because in Bible terms, “*the life of the flesh is in the blood*” (Leviticus 17:11). In other words, ordinary life needs blood, but the Lord Jesus now lives by God’s power.

When Christ Jesus gives people immortal life, their human bodies will become “*spiritual bodies*” (1 Corinthians 15:44-53). Their new bodies will no longer need blood as they will be energised by the Spirit of God. They will never suffer illness or pain, and never grow old or die:

“He (God) will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

The wonders of immortal life

What a wonderful way to live – to be able to fully enjoy all the good things which God gives us with blessings of health, strength, peace, security, and knowing more about the things of God. The saints will no longer have to struggle against sin. The mortal population who are taught about God and His gracious purpose will also be given the opportunity to live for ever, if they too are faithful.

You will remember that for a short while in the first century the apostles were given gifts of the Holy Spirit (Lesson 21). Some could preach the Gospel in foreign languages; some could heal the sick and cure mental illnesses. These gifts were just the ‘firstfruits’ – a pointer to the harvest of such gifts which the saints of the Kingdom of God will possess. What a marvellous glimpse we have of what the future will be like when the Lord Jesus returns!

Immortal life is never ending. Perhaps this is difficult for us to understand, because it is so different from life today. Some may think that immortal life would be boring. But God would never promise something disappointing.

We cannot understand the wonders of that time. When the great and rewarding activity of the Millennium is over, there will be an even better time! Then there will be a perfect relationship between the Creator and all His creation (1 Corinthians 15:28). This is what God planned in the beginning. This is the promise of eternal life.

Summary

1. Only God, the Lord Jesus Christ and the angels are immortal now.
2. At the judgement, the Lord Jesus will give true believers (saints) immortal life.
3. Those who are made immortal will have spiritual bodies. They will never suffer illness or pain, and will never grow old or die. They will be energised by the Spirit of God.
4. A saint is a true believer. Saints are not people who are given this title by church leaders.

A verse to learn: John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Verses to read: Daniel 12:1-3; John 17; 1 Corinthians 15:50-57

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