

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

PART II



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Question #16 - *“Does the spirit leave the body at the time of death? Then Jesus comes at the end of time and takes the soul home to heaven.”*

Last time, we began our discussion about this question by looking at how we were created to function, and the best way to understand how we were created to function is by talking about how the environment God placed us in was created and how it functions. Any understanding about death must begin with the foundational understanding that none of what we know could have existed without God; and thus, everything we are revolves not around an accident, such as evolution teaches, but around a design God put in place. What happens to us upon death will be no accident, but an event dictated by the dynamics God put in place from creation, coupled with God's interaction with us, and our interaction with Him over the course of time man has spend in this universe! Because this is all true, because death may be one of the most personal things we will ever experience, we must also have a firm understanding about what we, as individuals, were created to consist of! That is the subject we will begin a deeper look into in this segment of “A Matter Of Life And Death.”

In the end result, it simply does not matter how much people may try to reject God, the problem we all face is the fact we have little to no control over death.

Ultimately, we cannot stop it from taking us. On top of this, we cannot observe what is on the other side; and thus, we do not understand it, and many fear it. In many ways, this is simply because we were not meant to die. God originally placed man in a garden which contained a tree called the Tree of Life. (Gen. 2:8-9) This tree had the ability to sustain our physical forms indefinitely. (Gen. 3:22) However, without this tree man is no different from the animals, when it comes to the physical. If we go on down the verses in Genesis which we have been talking about, we arrive at Genesis chapter 2 verse 7, which tells us God created humans, not by speaking us into existence, nor by commanding an element - such as the earth - to bring us forth, but by specifically forming us out of the dust of the ground.

This is not completely unlike the way He created the plants and the animals. Just as with them, God formed our bodies from the elements already in existence; thus, our bodies are very similar to every other living thing we can observe. The biggest difference is that as individuals, Adam and Eve were created by the direct will of God. This is not to say the plants and animals were not the will of God, but plants and animals are part of the environment created for us. They have always lived and died in a cycle of events which sustain the planet and provide the things we need. When it comes to humans, God did not simply command an element, created prior to us, to bring forth an initial population of humans according to the earth's needs and/or space.

This is another reason theories that man comes up with - such as evolution - are not really one hundred and eighty degrees off from the truth. In fact, these theories are only a few degrees off, because if you get too far from the truth, the story is so obviously not true it won't survive. Thus, evolution calls itself “science” because it wants us to believe it's going on the basis of things that can be observed. What can be observed is the fact our bodies are very similar to those of the animals, but at the same time, we are not the same species as any animal. We share many physical characteristics, but why wouldn't we? Animals were created to survive and work in this environment God created, just the way He desired to create it, and so is our physical form! However, humans are in a very different category from the plants and animals in spite of the fact our physical forms are very much the same. This is a big part of why man wonders so much about death. Humans understand they are not simply like the other living things on this planet, and the teaching of evolution has not changed that hard fact.

To put it in more modern scientific terms, humans are not part of any ecosystem which exists. We are outside of them and drawing off the abundance the systems God created produces. This is why the first thing God did was try to get man to understand the consequences of living only for this life, and not for the purpose He created us for. To do this, He cursed the ground. After this, man's ability to simply feed off the excess this world produces was greatly hampered. As we see how easy it is for us to strip areas of the world of its resources, we should be struck with the truth: our lives are not made to simply be a part of the repeating living systems of this world. Our purpose is unto God. We are more than the plants and animals, and that is why God originally gave us a tree which could sustain us indefinitely!

Another reason man wonders about death so much, even though he gets many occasions to observe other living things go through it, is because man knows something else the creation story tells us. Man, unlike the animals, consists of more than just the physical form God made from the dust. Genesis 2:7 goes on to tell us God also, "...breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." That brings us directly to our question, which asks about the "spirit." If we are going to thoroughly understand this issue, we must understand the fullness of what we are. Looking at the creation story, we do not just see the fact God created us, we see God's determination about exactly how to make man. It would not be until chapter 2 we are given the specifics about God forming our bodies out of the dust of the ground; because first and foremost, God wanted us to understand and be clear on the basic facts and sequencing of creation. Thus, what we are told in chapter 1 is, before God ever puts hand to dirt, there was a blueprint for how man was going to be made.

In chapter 1 verse 26 God says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness:..." Just to be clear, this does not mean we are God, or able to become gods. This is why the word "image" is used. When you look in a mirror what you see is a likeness of yourself, but it is not you, nor very much like you in anyway, save the fact it visibly appears to be you. Your image is not alive; it cannot move on its own. In truth, it only consists of light which is reflecting off you, then off the mirror and back into your eye. This light is then processed by the brain. The image you see is something more than just in your head; because if someone else is standing in the right place, your reflection is also visible

to them; but if you leave, your reflection leaves with you.

In making us, God did not make duplicates, nor the attempt at a duplicate of Himself. What these words tell us is God determined humans would consist of parts which have relation to those parts He consists of. What the Bible tells us about God is that God is a Triune Being, consisting of God The Father, God The Son, and God The Holy Ghost. This is why we see the words "us" and "our." It could be said, at more than one point, God is talking to Himself, but this is not a phenomenon we should be surprised about. We also talk to ourselves. Those people who study the mental states of humans will tell you it's a bad thing if we do it too much, but this is only because it has been their observation: people who go on to have certain problems in life tend to share this activity in excess. In truth, it's impossible to say how much is too much. We consist of more than one part, each one made in the image of one of the parts God consists of. This is why there are also some very smart people who talk to themselves on a regular basis and find great value in doing so!

Now, we know the definitions of the parts God consists of mostly because of what the New Testament tells us, and more specifically because of what Jesus explained while walking this earth. However, let us not forget the words used here in Genesis, "us" and "our." The reason I say we see the truth, God consists of three parts, mainly once Jesus comes to this earth, is because we, again, see God talking to Himself. The difference in the case of Jesus living as a man among us is, Jesus attempts to explain to us how this all works, by giving us definitions. Jesus is God, and He clearly talked on many occasions about and to The Father - Who is also God. Jesus also spoke about The Holy Ghost. Some references come out as "Holy Spirit," which is the same; I just prefer to use the term "Ghost." In English, I feel this gives us more of a substance for this part of God in the same way calling Jesus The Son does, but it's simply a technical preference. The point here is, for our benefit, Jesus, who is God, is talking about how God is composed, which means He must use terminology we can understand!

Some people do not like the idea we say God is Triune, because they believe to do so is to teach there is more than One True God. However, this is a great misunderstanding of the point. First, we should recognize it was not a theory of man which brought about the terms: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. It is directly from

Scripture we get these terms. It was even The Messiah Himself who told us there was a Father and a Holy Ghost, and who called Himself The Son. The other times we hear Jesus called The Son is when God The Father is speaking about Jesus. (Matt. 3:13-17, 17:1-9) The true problem comes from the fact people believe this is somehow suggesting they are separated from being one entity. This is sometimes heightened by the fact those who believe in what is termed, "The Trinity," are not often clear on the facts themselves. They will also often refer to The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost as three distinct "personalities," as a way to explain it. While I'm not totally opposed to this definition, I will say it can be misleading. Again, what you're up against is the weakness of language.

The reason it can be problematic to talk about "personalities" is, as humans, we look at each person and say, "They have their own unique personality." If we say God has three distinct personalities, it can seem as if we are saying God is actually three individuals who work together in what is at best, a symbiotic relationship. Without a better way to say it, the truth is, we are actually talking about only parts which makeup one entity. This is why Jesus did not attempt to use words like "personality" to explain this truth, but instead used illustration. By giving the parts illustrative names, Jesus was attempting to help us understand the relationship that causes the parts to function properly as a whole!

The disciples had a bit of trouble with this idea themselves. In truth, it is a hard concept, especially if we are not thinking in the way we should about God being greater than what we can observe physically. The physical is what we see, and as the saying goes, "Seeing is believing." This is why one day Jesus is in the middle of explaining to the disciples that if they knew Him they knew The Father, and Philip asks Jesus to "show" them The Father, and with that they would be sufficed. (John 14:1-11) Jesus points out, after spending all the time together which they had, the disciples should have understood the concept by then. Because they obviously did not, Jesus explains again the point: if you have seen Him (Jesus), you have seen The Father!

Some people think what Jesus was saying is, I'm so much like The Father, or I'm so wrapped up in The Father, there is no reason to "see" The Father for yourself. That is not what Jesus was saying! Jesus emphasized the fact they should have understood the point already, because they should have understood before

He ever came, there is only One God; and by that time in walking with Jesus, they should have grasp the fact their forefather Abraham knew centuries before - God was going to provide Himself a Lamb. (Gen. 22:7-8) If they believed Jesus was that Lamb Abraham knew would be provided, it should be easy to understand Jesus is God Himself. There is no reason to ask to "see" The Father or The Holy Ghost. If God was going to physically come to us in the form we live in, it was going to be The Son we were going to "see"!

Now, seeing Jesus is not experiencing all of God, but it is "seeing" God, just as seeing a person on the street is not knowing them, but it is, in truth, seeing them. To truly know a person, you have to develop a relationship with them. How deep you know a person is dependent on how deep each of you are willing to go and what you are willing to share with one another. Jesus wanted the disciples to know there is more to God than just the part which they could see with their eyes, and that is why Jesus instructs us to seek The Father through Him, and The Holy Ghost could also be known and help us know The Father, as well as The Son. (John 14:6-26)

All this perhaps makes better sense if we go back to the point that helps us understand death and its consequences for humans. Again, we, as humans, are made in the image of God. Unlike an animal or plant, which is nothing more than physical, we are physical plus something more. That something more is often simply referred to as "spirit," but this is just a generic way of referring to everything which is not of the flesh. For the sake of reference, it may make better sense, when generally referring to those parts of us which are not of the flesh, to say our "soul." The point, again, is when people see us, they too do not experience all which we are, they only "see" us. Seeing may be believing in many people's book, but seeing is not finding all there is to know. All of what we actually are is triune in the image of God. We have the flesh, which we are very familiar with. Then we have a spirit, which is something we do not understand very much about, and which is not just that generic reference to all that is not of the flesh. We also have a mind, and this is not a reference to the gray tangled mass of nerves and such in our skulls. What is in our skull is the physical control panel which may be, for the sake of reference, best referred to as the brain. The true mind is another part of us that is not of the flesh. Once again, we are limited by language.

The reason Jesus said, if you have seen Him, you

have seen The Father, is because Jesus (or The Son) is what our physical forms are a reflection of; and this is the reason The Son came to earth as a man. It's also the reason Jesus said He was the part which was going to prepare a "place" for us, so where God is, we can be also. (John 14:1-3) The fact Jesus is responsible for what we know here is pointed out to us in the Gospel of John. "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." John 1:3 People who believe they understand things about the Bible will sometimes tell you the part you can see is not really them. They believe they understand a truth in the idea that what counts is what is on the inside. However, this is no more true than believing Jesus is not truly God. Our flesh is a part of us. The fact we lose it because of death is a big problem for us, and the precise problem Jesus came to deal with!

What we call our spirit is that part which is reflective of The Holy Ghost. Again, we do not understand this part very well, but that is mostly because it's easy to neglect it. God sent The Holy Ghost to us after Jesus left this earth, because nurturing this flesh is not a useful thing. It is in this sense, we can apply the old adage: it's what's on the inside that counts. This flesh is going to die! Without the Tree of Life to sustain us, we cannot hope to escape this truth. What we need to understand is that Jesus did not come in order to change this fact, Jesus has accomplished the needed work to take care of the fact this is a problem! Jesus will also return in the future to take care of other business of our fleshly existence, which we will touch on later. In the meantime, we should understand our spirit is a part of us right now, but unlike the flesh, it will not die. Thus, The Holy Ghost was sent to nurture our spirit and draw our focus off the flesh. If we will follow His leading, we will become aware of the more important issues of the here and now and be able to make better choices in using our lives - even the flesh - as a tool in service to God. At the very least, we can and should work to make the flesh a slave to righteousness, instead of allowing it to harm others through sin. (I Pet. 4:1-11, I Jn. 2:15-17)

Directing our flesh, as well as our spirit, is ultimately the responsibility of the mind. The mind is the part of us that reflects God The Father, and one of the big reasons Jesus attempted to explain God's composition to us by using illustrative names, which come from the family structure God created humans to live in, is that it's something we should be able to understand no matter how fleshly we have allowed our thinking to become. In seeing the illustration, we can see the cor-

rect way we are suppose to order things in our lives. Being made in the image of God means we should order our existence in the same way God orders His. Of course, as we have been discussing, God is at a totally different level than we are; but the truth is, we were created to function in a like fashion.

Now, the father is the head of the household according to the way God set up a family unit; and while many like to look at this as authority, it's actually a big responsibility. (Matt. 19:1-9) For a family unit to function properly, there needs to be a decision maker who should be taking everything into account and ultimately making the final call on issues that arise. Now, as so much in our world of dysfunctional families, high levels of divorce and remarriage, etc. has proven, this is not an order we are forced to follow, or that is unbreakable. However, in spite of the fact children rebel against their parents, wives no longer want to honor their husbands, and husbands no longer seek God in order to lead their families properly, none of this negates the truth that God established an order to the family in the same way He established an order to all the universe we live in. (Col. 3:15-24) Jesus uses this family order to show us God also created a similar order we should have in our personal lives; and we should be able to see, we would be much better off if we all attempted to use and cherish it.

Perhaps to understand what the mind is, it also helps to understand what it isn't. Animals, being only flesh, do not have a mind, only a brain. They do what they do because of instinct. Instinct, and the fact it can seem very complex at times, should not be an amazement to us. The body itself even has instinct built right into its individual cells. Humans are only now beginning to understand these facts, and the fact when these embedded instincts of the cells go wrong it's the cause of things, such as cancer. However, if cells can have built in instructions which guide them to be bone, skin, etc., it should not surprise us that the brain is capable of far more reactive and complex instincts.

At the core of it all, animal instinct is based on some very simple objectives no matter how complex their everyday living may seem. Animals, as well as plants, want to survive. Thus, they have instincts which causes them to avoid danger when they recognize it. They have the instinct to do what is needed to procreate. They also have the instinct to find food and water, which is necessary on a continual basis for all living things. Thus, some animals, such as ants and many vermin, even store

these things for later use. Our flesh, again, is much like the plants and animals, and it has all these instincts as well. Our brain, which is still part of the flesh, and even more complex in and of itself than any animal's brain, can learn facts far beyond the "smartest" animals; and it can react to things, even attempting experiments as to what the best reaction is in any particular situation. Like the animals, in many ways, these instincts are necessary to our physical existence. However, humans were not created to live only by the instincts of our flesh. When we do not use our mind to guide and control our actions, and especially when we allow our instincts to determine our desires and direction in life, they cause us big problems. (Gal. 5:16-26)

The flesh can cause us a lot of trouble if left to its own devices, because, again, we were not made to live like animals. Humans were not built to be a part of the balanced system of nature; and thus, human flesh wants to do more than just what satisfies its basic desire to survive, and do our part in the world. Even our instincts, far more than any animal's, include a desire for comfort and stimulation. If we allow our choices to be dictated by the flesh's desires and instincts, there is no end to the wrong we will end up doing to ourselves, others, and even the environment we all live in! The fact we need to keep our flesh under submission to the mind is what Jesus was showing us in the fact He always submitted Himself to The Father's will, even telling us directly, He came not to do His will, but that of His Father. (John 5:30)

Jesus came to do a work which was His to do, but He came because of choices made by The Father. This is probably best seen in the night before Jesus' crucifixion as Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus, being the part of God which would have to suffer on the cross, did not want to. Thus, the request made of The Father, by Jesus, was, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me:..." There is no reason to believe there was any other way, but for just a moment we have to stop and think about the fact, even if there had been, this may still have been the best way! Jesus knew this fact as well, and that is why He went on to pray, "...nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." Matthew 26:39 The Father was The One Who could make the right and balanced choice.

Our flesh, as well as our spirit, will continually tell the mind what they desire and will seek especially those things they need. However, it's always up to the mind to allow or disallow any action. One of the most basic of

these is seen in the simple fact our flesh gets hungry, but we do not have to stop what we are doing and feed it. This is even true in spite of physical ailments which do not allow certain people to go very long without food before they faint or experience even more life threatening conditions. The mind can control the flesh in spite of the flesh's instincts. If the flesh gets sick or begins to break down in its ability to operate, the mind may not be able to do much to control, especially, certain aspects of the flesh's behavior. However, all this just makes it obvious the mind needs to be conscious of the flesh's true needs, and the fact the flesh can and will eventually cease to operate altogether.

This brings us back to the fact, it's not just what is on the inside that counts, and the flesh is indeed a part of us. The flesh has obvious capabilities that are needed, and which are at our mind's disposal. One of the most basic of these is the fact we can be mobile, which directly relates to our earlier discussion about why we are similar to the plants and animals in our flesh's design. This universe is the space we were meant to be mobile in. We can also verbally communicate using the flesh, and in turn we can intake communication from others while experiencing all kinds of physical sights, sounds, tastes, and touches. Ultimately losing all these abilities to death is at the heart of the question we're dealing with here. The flesh is not just a shell we live in, it's necessary for our ability to live in the way God created us to live!

In our next segment we will continue talking about how we were created to live, and operate as a triune being. We will also get into more detail about the work Jesus came to do, and why. This will take us further down the road to understanding what it means to be "born again," which is something very important to our understanding about what happens upon Jesus' return. Until then, I pray you will grow in His assurance and comfort, as you prepare your life to meet The Lord at His return!

