

Is There a Spirit Distinct From the Body?

I. Introduction

A. The Bible teaches that man has both a physical body as well as a spirit distinct from the flesh, but the Jehovah's Witnesses deny this. Instead, they teach that man has NO spirit distinct from the body and therefore no conscious existence after death.

B. To further solidify in your mind what it is that the Jehovah's Witnesses believe, consider the following quote from the Watch Tower Society: "According to almost every religion, past and present, we somehow live on forever with the ability to see, hear, and think. Yet, how can that be? Our senses, along with our thoughts, are all linked to the workings of our brain. At death, the brain stops working...What happens at death is no mystery to Jehovah, the Creator of the brain. He knows the truth, and in his Word, the Bible, he explains the condition of the dead. Its clear teaching is this: *When a person dies, he ceases to exist*...Not even one part of us survives the death of the body. We do not possess an immortal soul or spirit." (*What Does the Bible Really Teach*, pg. 58, printed by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania in 2006)

C. Using the scriptures as our guide, let us affirm that man does possess an immortal soul distinct from the body, and let us respond to the common arguments and prooftexts of the Watchtower Society.

II. The Nature of God – Man is Made in God's Image

A. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Gen. 1:26).

B. Genesis 1:26 teaches that man is made in the image of God. The question then that we must ask is, "what is the image or nature of God?"

1. God is a spirit (Jn. 4:24) and a spirit does not have flesh and bones (Lk. 24:39).
2. In fact, God is referred to as being the Father of spirits (Heb. 12:9).
3. Jesus, when He came into the world, *became* flesh (Jn. 1:14), which implies that in the heavenly realm He was not flesh.
4. God is invisible (Col. 1:15) and we are His offspring (Ac. 17:29).

C. Now that we have established the image/nature of God (He is a spirit-being), it should be clear that we are made in God's image in the sense that we have an eternal spirit. After all, God is not a physical, fleshly creature, so we are not comparable to God on that basis. Furthermore, animals are not made in the image of God, so there is something that sets us apart from animals...and it is our eternal spirit.

D. NOTE: Jehovah's Witnesses will contend that we are made in the image of God in the sense that we have been given dominion over the earth (as God also has dominion over the earth). But the structure of Genesis 1:26 does not permit that interpretation. The ability to dominate is the RESULT of being made in God's image.

III. Understanding the Terms "Soul" and "Spirit"

A. The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew while the New Testament was written primarily in Greek. In the Old Testament we find the Hebrew words NEPESH (soul) and RUACH (spirit) while in the New Testament we find the Greek words PSUCHE (soul) and PNEUMA (spirit). Each of these four terms can refer to the immortal "spirit" of man but they can also refer to other things such as the physical person, the mind and even air or wind.

B. Jehovah's Witnesses will argue that these words never refer to an immortal spirit (of man) as they deny that such a thing exists. After all, according to the Jehovah's Witnesses, man's flesh *is his soul*; they are one and the same, and thus when man dies, he ceases to exist.

C. But let's notice how these words often refer to the immortal spirit of man:

1. "But his flesh upon him shall have pain, and his soul (NEPHESH) within him shall mourn" (Job. 14:22). Here, the word "soul" is contrasted with "flesh." This ought to prove to us that the Hebrew word NEPHESH can refer to a soul distinct from the body.
2. "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit (RUACH) shall return unto God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7). Man was formed of the dust, but there is clearly a spirit distinct from the physical flesh.
3. "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls (PSUCHE)" (Mt. 11:29) Jesus tells us that when we come to Him, our "soul" finds rest. This cannot be in reference to the physical body.
4. "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit (PNEUMA) hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have" (Lk. 24:39). Jesus said this to prove that his physical body was resurrected. The word "spirit" is contrasted with the physical body.

D. Finally, let us notice how the words "soul" and "spirit" can be used together to describe the whole of man's composition.

1. "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23).
2. "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).
3. We might wonder what these terms mean relative to one another (in these two verses), but there is no question that man is of a dual-nature. We have a physical body as well as a spirit distinct from that body.

III. Man Possesses an Immortal Soul

A. "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" (Mt. 10:28).

1. The Jehovah's Witnesses contend that the soul and body of man are one and the same, but this verse says that while the body can be slain, the soul lives on.
2. If the body and soul are the same, and if when the body is slain the soul is slain (because they are the same), then why should we fear God more than man? In other words, what can God do to us that man is incapable of doing? You see, Jesus makes a clear distinction here. There MUST be a soul distinct from the flesh in order for this verse to make any sense.
3. Jehovah's Witnesses like to play on the word "destroy" in the latter part of the verse. They want to say that God annihilates the soul. First of all, if God can "annihilate" the soul where man cannot, then there is still a distinction between the two (because man can kill the body, which according to the Jehovah's Witnesses is the soul). Second, the Greek word here for "destroy" is *apollumi*. The same Greek word is used in Luke 15:4 which says, "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose (apollumi) one..." The same Greek word is translated as "lose" in this verse. The point is this: the word "destroy" in Matthew 10:28 does not refer to annihilation, but rather to ruin, separation, apostasy, etc.

B. Luke 16:19-31 records the story of the rich man and Lazarus as it was told by Jesus. The story is of a rich man and a poor man who both die. The rich man goes to a place of torment whereas the poor man, Lazarus, goes to a place of rest (Abraham's bosom, vv. 22). This passage clearly indicates that man possesses a soul distinct from the flesh that lives on after the flesh perishes.

1. Jehovah's Witnesses try to argue that the story is simply a parable, and that we're not to take it literally. But if, according to the JWs, there is no afterlife, is it reasonable that Jesus would then use a pagan story to illustrate a scriptural truth? The JWs reject the celebration of Christmas because of its origins in paganism, yet they want to argue in Luke 16 that Jesus told a pagan story? Clearly they are grasping at straws here.

C. Passages such as Romans 8:3-7 and Galatians 5:16-17 discuss the ongoing battle between the flesh and the spirit. This confirms, once again, that there is a distinction between the two. We can submit to the flesh and be carnally minded or we can submit to the spirit and be spiritually minded. According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, the flesh and spirit are one and the same, but that makes no sense in light of this fact that is discussed throughout the New Testament.

D. Another extremely powerful passage is Philippians 1:21-23. It says, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a straight betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you."

1. Paul, who was living in the flesh, said that it would be "gain" to die. Why would it be gain to die if death simply meant annihilation and non-existence? He answers the question for us in verses 22-23. To depart (die) meant that he would be with Christ! This proves that there is a conscious existence after death. Paul didn't anticipate non-existence, but rather he looked forward to being with Christ. Being with Christ would occur when Paul departed.

E. Jehovah's Witnesses teach that there is no "outer man" and "inward man," but 2 Corinthians 4:16 says, "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." Our physical body (outward man) is perishing. It is getting older and older and nearing the point of death. But our inward man is being renewed daily. One is getting older and weaker while the other is getting stronger. This proves that there is a soul distinct from the flesh.

F. When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain in Matthew 17, it says that Moses and Elijah appeared and communed with Him (vv. 3). If there is no soul distinct from the body, how could this have happened? After all, Moses and Elijah had long been dead (physically). Another passage along these lines is Luke 20:37-38 which says, "Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For He is not the God of the dead, but of the living: for all live in Him."

1. If God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and if He is also the God of the living, the conclusion is that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, although dead physically, are alive spiritually.

2. This explains the appearance of Moses and Elijah when Jesus was transfigured.

G. Ecclesiastes 12:7 says, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." Man's physical body is composed of dust (Gen. 2:7), and when man dies, the body decays and returns to dust. If the body IS the soul (as the Jehovah's Witnesses teach), then this also means the annihilation of the soul, but Eccl. 12:7 says that when the body dies, the spirit returns not to dust, but to God who gave it. This denies the Watch Tower's position!

H. Revelation 6:9-10 says, "And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: and they cried with a loud voice, saying How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not avenge our blood on them that dwell upon the earth?" These were martyred saints (they had been slain for the word of God) and they are pictured beneath the altar of God in heaven. They cried out to God, requesting that God avenge their blood. There is no doubt here that the martyred saints lived on after death (consider also Rev. 7:9-14).

1. Will the Jehovah's Witness say that the book of Revelation is filled with pagan imagery? Or will they humbly acknowledge that they are wrong, that there is a soul distinct from the flesh that lives on after the point of death.

I. A number of other passages could be cited, but these few should suffice to show that there is a soul distinct from the flesh. If there is not, then the scriptures are filled with pagan imagery and confusing texts. Why not just embrace the scriptural position?

IV. The Reality of Eternal Torment

A. Because the Jehovah's Witnesses deny the existence of an eternal soul apart from the body, they also deny the reality of eternal torment. These two doctrines are intertwined. However, we have

already shown from the scriptures that there IS an eternal soul distinct from the flesh, and so there MUST be a place called hell that involves eternal torment. After all, if there is an eternal soul, then it must go on after the point of death to dwell *in some place*, whether in heaven with God or in hell with the unrighteous. But let us go ahead and address the Jehovah's Witnesses' rejection of hell, just so that our study is complete and well-rounded.

B. There are three Greek words which are translated as "hell" in the King James Version. Let us briefly discuss those three words and their meanings:

1. Gehenna: Refers to the Valley of Hinnom, a valley outside of Jerusalem; used as a name for the place of everlasting punishment. See Mt. 5:22, 29; 10:28; Jas. 3:6. When the average person speaks of "hell" they have Gehenna in mind.

a. The Jehovah's Witness will argue that because the Valley of Hinnom was a trash dump where refuse and bodies were burned and destroyed, that "hell" refers to annihilation.

b. However, Jesus did not use the term Gehenna because He wanted to establish the JW doctrine of annihilation. Rather, He used it because over time the Valley of Hinnom had come to symbolize the horribleness of hell.

c. Furthermore, the fire in the Valley of Hinnom could be quenched; that is, it could eventually burn through the garbage and corpses, but Gehenna, or hell as we understand it, involves *unquenchable fire* (Mk. 9:43-45).

2. Hades: The word *Hades* has several meanings. Number one, it refers to the place of departed souls as illustrated in Luke 16:19-31. Verse 23 says that "in hell (Hades) he lifted up his eyes, being in torments..." The rich man was in a place called Hades, a place of departed souls. But the word can also refer simply to the grave, as in Acts 2:31 (the body of Christ was not left to decay in Hades, or the grave).

3. Tartarus: Refers to the deepest abyss of Hades, a place of eternal torment. This Greek word is only used one time in the New Testament, and that is 2 Peter 2:4 which says, "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell (Tartarus), and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment..." Tartarus appears to be a kind of "temporary holding cell," a tortuous place where wicked angels are reserved unto the day of judgment (which is yet future).

4. One might ask a Jehovah's Witness, "If there is no soul distinct from the flesh, and if there is not place of eternal torment, then why are there two Greek words *Gehenna* and *Hades*?" After all, according to the Jehovah's Witness, the grave (Hades) is Gehenna.

C. The Bible teaches that hell (Gehenna) is eternal. Matthew 25:46 says, "And these (the wicked) shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." This verse clearly proves that hell is a literal place of eternal punishment. If one is being *punished* for eternity, then there must be conscious existence. Furthermore, we must conclude here that eternal punishment is just as long as eternal life. This leaves no room for the JW doctrine of annihilation.

D. Not only does hell involve eternal punishment, but also "unquenchable fire." Matthew 3:12 says that "He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire," and Mark 9:43 says "it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched." You see, this is not the kind of fire that annihilates the body and forces it into a state of non-existence. Rather, this hellfire is unquenchable. You might relate this point to Exodus 3:2 which speaks of the "burning bush." The bush burned but it was not consumed. QUESTION: Why would Jesus speak of unquenchable hellfire if in fact the soul is annihilated at the point of death?

E. Revelation 20:10 says, "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 forever and ever." Does this sound like eternal punishment (Mt. 25:46) or annihilation? The former! Someone might argue, "Well, that's the devil and his angels, not unrighteous men." But notice Revelation 20:14-15, "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.” You see, eternal torment in the lake of fire is not confined to the devil, but to all the unrighteous whose names are not written in the book of life. Consider also Revelation 2:11.

F. Matthew 11:22 says, “But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for thee,” and again in verse 24, “But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.” QUESTION: If hell is annihilation, how could it be said that it would be worse for some than for others? If when the body dies, the soul also enters a state of complete non-existence, how could that non-existence be worse for some than for others? The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ position makes no sense here in this passage. Consider also passages such as Matthew 18:6-8 and 2 Peter 2:20-21.

G. Mark 9:43-44 says, “And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” This passage speaks not only of unquenchable fire but also unquenchable worms. It says that in hell there are worms that do not die. Jehovah’s Witnesses say that in hell, the soul is annihilated; that is, it dies when the body dies (because they are one and the same), but the Bible says that in hell, the fire never dies and the worms never die. So according to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, God has given more power to fire and worms, because while the human soul dies and ceases to exist, they do not. Interesting.

H. Hell involves the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt. 13:41-42). This makes no light in sense of the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ position.

I. We also know that even the wicked will live immortally. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:22, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” This passage is speaking of the physical death that resulted from the sin of Adam. All face physical death at some point because of Adam, but in Christ ALL are made alive. Later, in verse 53, it says that mortal man must put on “immortality.” This pertains to the righteous as well as the unrighteous. The only thing that distinguishes the two is *where* they spend their immortality...in hell or in heaven (2 Cor. 5:10).

J. NOTE: Jehovah’s Witnesses sometimes try to use Ecclesiastes 9:5 in an attempt to justify their position. The verse says, “For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.” In context, God is not saying that there is no conscious existence after death. Rather, God is saying that the dead do not have knowledge of the continued happenings on earth. Job 14:19-22 makes this very clear. God is simply contrasting life with death, and is stressing the importance of living a life of purpose.

K. Much more could be said about the reality of hell, and many additional passages could be considered, but these few should suffice.

VI. Conclusion

A. The scriptures plainly teach that man has a soul distinct from the body and that this soul lives in eternally in heaven or in hell. Hell is a literal place of punishment just as Heaven is a literal place of bliss and perfection (Rev. 21:8).

B. Yet another doctrine of the Jehovah’s Witnesses has fallen.

C. Are you prepared for eternity?