

28 (3)
4-2

Doctrinal Outlines

WHAT IS MAN?

I. Introduction

- A. "I am not an animal! I am a human being!" exclaimed John Merrick, the so-called "elephant man," called this because he was sadly deformed by a physical debility that twisted his features to loosely resemble that creature.
- B. Yes, John Merrick knew he was not an animal, but these days evolutionists are not so sure. They believe we are all animals, mere descendants of primitive life forms that also spawned the apes and other creatures on this earth by the process of evolution.
- C. Are they correct? Is man an animal, or an immortal soul in a mortal body (as most religionists would argue)? Can we know?
- D. Happily, the answer is yes, we can know, for the Bible plainly reveals the answers.

II. The Basic Doctrine

- A. Man is not an animal, nor an immortal soul housed in a fleshly body. He is, rather, a totally mortal being but with a spiritual component -- the spirit in man.
- B. The spirit in man gives him the power of conscious human mind and free will, and coupled with God's Holy Spirit forms the converted Christian mind.

III. The Usual Teachings of This World

- A. ✓ The nonbiblical misconceptions about this subject form strong emotional attachments for scientists and religionists alike.
- B. ✓ Many scientists, of course, believe in the unproven theory of evolution, and think man to be merely the most advanced link in the unbroken chain of animal life that sprang spontaneously from chemical soup by blind chance.
- C. Religionists, on the other hand, cling with equal vehemence to the belief that man is an immortal soul

housed in an evil fleshly body, waiting to be freed at death and serve out eternity in blissful happiness in heaven or endless agony in hell.

- D. Surprisingly, both theories are wrong. Of course, the theory of evolution does not make the pretense of originating with the Bible.
- E. The proponents of the immortal soul theory, on the other hand, assume their belief has its roots in God's Word. But they, too, are incorrect.
- F. For, astoundingly, the belief in the immortal soul arose, not from sound biblical doctrine taught or written by the prophets or apostles, but from ancient, heathen Egypt.
- G. Then it was adopted by pagan Greek philosophers like Plato.
- H. Finally it infiltrated traditional Christianity through church "fathers" who themselves believed the teaching, but who had adopted it from pagan Greek philosophy -- not from the Bible.
- I. No wonder the apostle Paul wrote for us to "beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain ~~deceit~~, after the tradition of men" (Colossians 2:8, King James Version).
- J. But we need not rest on the historical record alone, for the doctrine of the immortality of the soul falls shattered to the ground in light of the plain teaching of God's Word.

IV. The Bible Teaching

- A. To be sure, the Bible does indeed use the word soul, (never the phrase "immortal soul," however).
- B. But the word soul is merely a translation in the Old and New Testaments of other words from both Hebrew and Greek.
- C. We must look to these languages and the context in which the words are used if we are to understand the words translated "soul" in modern versions.
- D. To begin, notice that man "became a living soul," according to Genesis 2:7 (KJV). And observe that this verse does not say man has a soul, but that he is a soul.

1. Further, the English word translated "soul" here and in other places is the Hebrew word nephesh, which means a "living, breathing creature"; it thus includes both animal and human life.
 2. The very same word, nephesh, refers to animals in Genesis 1:20-21, 24, 2:19 and 9:10, 12, 15, where it is translated "creature," as well as in Genesis 1:30, 9:4, Leviticus 11:10, 17:11 and other scriptures.
 3. Not only does the word translated "soul" in the Old Testament not imply immortality, nor even superiority to animals, but it is even used to represent dead bodies in Leviticus 21:1, 11, Numbers 6:6, 11 and elsewhere.
 4. And twice in the same Bible chapter does God directly say, when speaking of human beings, "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4, 20).
- E. The Greek word translated "soul" in the New Testament is used in a similar sense, referring only to physical, mortal life (I Corinthians 15:45).
1. Jesus Himself proclaimed that the soul can be destroyed in hell (Matthew 10:28).
 2. The apostle John shows men are not immortal souls with his statement that "no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (I John 3:15).
 3. Paul proclaimed man's mortality with the words "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), not immortal life in hell!
- F. Clearly, the doctrine of the immortal soul is a myth, foisted upon the Christian world from paganism!
- G. But more must be said about this important topic of what man is. For, although man is merely a mortal soul -- a mortal, living, breathing creature like an animal -- man is nonetheless clearly not a mere beast like a monkey or a goat or a horse.
- H. For man -- unlike the animals who have been made each "after his [own] kind" (Genesis 1:25, KJV) -- is made in God's own "image" and "likeness" (verse 26), and is therefore after the God kind and with God's general appearance.
- I. Also, and even more importantly, man has a spiritual component, the "spirit in man," which, when combined with the human brain, produces the human mind, with

its unique self-awareness and capacity for free will and character development.


1. As the book of Job says, "It is a spirit in man...that giveth them understanding" (Job 32:8, Jewish Publication Society translation).
2. Likewise, the prophet Zechariah confirms that God "forms the spirit of man within him" (Zechariah 12:1).
3. Paul declares that man has a "spirit" within him -- a human spirit that gives man his unique human mind: "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?" (I Corinthians 2:11).


J. But caution is in order here. It is tempting for some who have believed in the immortal-soul theory to conclude that the spirit in man is merely another term for the immortal soul and that the whole argument is simply one of semantics. Not so.

1. This spirit essence is not an immortal soul.
2. The spirit in man is not the man. It is something in the man.
3. It has no life of itself, for the life of a man is in the air he breathes and in the blood that circulates that breath through his body (Genesis 2:7, Leviticus 17:11).
4. It does not of itself see or hear (for even a blind or deaf person, though deprived of one of his senses, is altogether human.)
5. And at death it has no consciousness of itself, for it sleeps (I Corinthians 11:30, 15:51, I Thessalonians 4:14)

K. Yet the spirit in man imparts the human qualities of mind to the man (read I Corinthians 2:9-12), and, like a tape recorder, forms a permanent record of the qualities of mind and character built by a man during his lifetime.

1. Much as a used tape is stored lifelessly on a shelf till activated for use in a recorder, so does the spirit of man "return to God who gave it" after death.
2. It remains with God until the resurrection when life is again given to a person (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

 L. But those whom God has called and chosen -- and they alone -- receive yet an additional component added to their makeup. It is not the spirit of man, for man has that naturally and automatically.

M.  It is another spirit, the Spirit of God Himself, which is given to those who have been called and properly baptized with the laying on of hands (Acts 2:38).

1. This Spirit begets us spiritually much like a human is begotten physically in his mother's womb (I Peter 1:3).

2. It joins with our own spirit (Romans 8:16-17) and provides both the fruits or qualities of God Himself in us and the ability to understand, not merely the things of men, but spiritual knowledge from God (I Corinthians 2:11-12).

✓ 3. Further, once we become converted and are filled with that Spirit, we have the seed and down payment of eternal life within us, which, unless rejected later by us, will indeed blossom into full eternal life at Christ's return (II Corinthians 5:1-5).

N. How incredible that we -- mere humans -- may have within us the mind of God and the very knowledge of God!

V. Key Verses

It helps understanding to remember the most important scriptures on a topic. Here are a few:

✓ A. Genesis 2:7 -- man is a soul.

✓ B. Genesis 1:20 -- the same word used as "soul" in Genesis 2:7 is here translated as "living creature."

✓ C. Ezekiel 18:4, 20 -- souls can die.

✓ D. Job 32:8, Zechariah 12:1, I Corinthians 2:11 -- there is a spirit in man.

✓ E. I Corinthians 2:11-12 -- the spirit in man gives man the unique powers of human mind, and the Spirit of God in a man gives him a godly (spiritually enlightened) mind.

VI. Conclusion

The incredible and true picture is now complete. Man is not an animal nor an immortal soul housed in a fleshly

body, but is rather a totally mortal being, but with a spiritual component -- the spirit in man, which gives him the power of conscious human mind and free will, and which couples with God's Holy Spirit to form the converted Christian mind.

Yes, John Merrick, the "elephant man," was right. Neither he nor the rest of us are animals, but rather human beings, made in the image of God with the hope of eternal glory!