



Type: Magazine Article

Immortality of the Spirit

Author(s): S. J. Foster

Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (December 1903)

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Page(s): 100–102

Abstract: This article discusses the immortality of the spirit in light of Genesis 2:7.

IMMORTALITY OF THE SPIRIT.

BY ELDER S. J. FOSTER, MISSIONARY, BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA.

Alfred Tennyson once said: "I can hardly understand how any great imaginative man, who has deeply lived, suffered, thought, and wrought, can doubt of the soul's (spirit's) continuous progress in after life." Yet we find that such is the case with some men today. We meet with men of learning who not only deny the progress of the spirit in *after* life, but who deny the very existence of a spirit. These men are not always atheists or infidels, but frequently men who profess faith in, and reverence for, the Bible. However, this is nothing new under the sun, for way back in the time of Christ's ministry on earth, we read in Acts 23:8: "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor *spirit*: but the Pharisees confess both."

Now let us examine the question a moment. For many years scientists have held opposite views on the origin of life. One school has believed in the doctrine of Biogenesis—that is: life only from pre-existing life. While the other school has believed in the doctrine of Spontaneous Generation—that is, life is not the gift of life, but it is capable of springing into being of itself. Today, the doctrine of Biogenesis is almost universally accepted by the scientists of the world. By their best chemical and microscopical tests they are unable to distinguish any difference between the embryo of man and the lower animals, or even between the animal and vegetable at a certain stage of their development. Just why one germ develops a man, another a cow, and another a tree, they are unable to say—yet so it is. The mysterious molder—life, or spirit, in each case seems to fashion the thing after its own likeness. But let us go

to the word of God, the Bible, and see what that says of the matter, for if we speak not according to that word, it is because there is no light in us.

Those who profess belief in the Bible, and yet do not believe in the spirit as a living entity, base their views on such passages as these: Gen. 2:7: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the *breath* of life; and man became a living soul." Also Psalms 146:4, etc., etc. From these and similar passages they argue that *breath* is the life of the body. But if we read Gen. 9: 3-6; Lev. 17:10-15; Deut. 12: 23; etc., we there learn just as emphatically, that the *blood* is the life of the body. And again, we read in Job 34:14, 15: "If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto Himself his *spirit* and *breath*, all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust." See also Acts 17:25, etc. From these passages we learn that there is a distinction between *spirit* and *breath*. While both *breath* and *blood* are characteristic of mortal life, yet neither is life.

But it seems to me that there is scripture which directly states that man has a spirit which is a living entity which will exist as a distinct individuality when separated from the body.

Consider the following: Job 32:8: "But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding." Also Zech. 12:1: "The burden of the word of the Lord for Israel, saith the Lord, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and *formeth* the *spirit* of man within him." Again, from the following references the only natural interpretation is that Paul and Peter were thoroughly convinced that the spirit is intelligent, when separated from the body. See I Cor. 5:5; II Cor. 5:1-9; II Cor. 12:2; Philippians 1:23, 24; II Peter 1:13,14; and especially I Peter 3:18-21; 4:6; where we read that Christ preached to the *spirits* in prison who rejected the counsel of God in the days of Noah. These rebellious spirits were again offered the Gospel, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. Why this preaching to spirits, if they were not intelligent and capable of receiving the message? What about the evil spirits spoken of in the Bible who knew that Jesus is the Christ? Yet we read that no ordinary man can know that Jesus is the Christ, save by the Holy Ghost. See I Cor. 13:3.

Christ himself said: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul (spirit): but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul (spirit) and body in hell." James says: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." Yes; when we speak of death, it is the death of the body, not the spirit—a separation, a shuffling off this mortal coil.

The Prophet Joseph was told by revelation that the spirit when separated from the body cannot receive a fulness of joy, but the spirit and body, when joined in the glorious resurrection, may receive a fulness.

So, no matter what mystery may envelop man's existence, both in this life and in the life to come—no matter how feeble his efforts in defining the characteristics of the spirit, yet we feel confident in saying with Martineau: "Yes! God and immortality—a sufficient basis for religion." And with Longfellow:

"Life is real, life is earnest,
And the grave is not its goal.
Dust thou art to dust returnest
Was not spoken of the soul" (spirit).

BE A .SUNBEAM.

Taking life too seriously is said to be an especially American failing. This may be true, but judging from appearances, it would seem to be world-wide, for, go where one may, he will find the proportion of serious, not to say anxious, faces ten to one as compared with the merry or happy ones. If "the outer is always the form or shadow of the inner," how many sad histories may be read in the faces of those we meet every day! The pity of it is, too, that the sadness is a self-woven garment, even as is the joy with which it might be replaced. Ruskin says, "Girls should be sunbeams, not only to members of their own circle, but to everybody with whom they come in contact. Every room they enter should be brighter for their presence." Why shouldn't all of us be sunbeams, boys as well as girls, all along the way from twenty-five years and under to eighty-five years and over?