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Dear Friend:

Many have asked about the meaning of Matthew 10:28. This verse reads: "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."

The doctrine of the immortality or indestructibility of the soul is often based on this text, although Jesus plainly says that we should fear God who is able to DESTROY THE SOUL in hell or Gehenna fire. The soul is something that can be destroyed. Ezekiel 18:4 says the same thing: ". . . the soul that sinneth, it shall die," not live forever in torment. The soul can die. It can be destroyed because of sin, the transgression of the law (I John 3:4).

But, what is the soul if man can't kill it?

The word "soul" is used in numerous ways. It is a translation of the Greek word psuche and the Hebrew word nephesh, both of which mean, according to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, a living, breathing creature, an animal life, appetite and similarly derived connotations. Soul can NEVER mean an immortal part of man or animal but always the living, breathing animal or man, also the life of a breathing being which is in the blood. In Leviticus 17:11 the word translated "life" comes from the same Hebrew word for "soul" and can be correctly translated: for the soul of the flesh is in the blood. Jesus gave His life (translated from the same Greek word meaning soul), a ransom for us (Mark 10:45) by pouring out His soul of life blood in payment for sin (Isa. 53:12). "Soul" can mean the living, breathing animal or man and it can also mean the physical life of such creatures.

Remember, God can destroy the physical body and the soul or life. Luke quotes Jesus as saying: "But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell . . ." (Luke 12:5). God, who takes the present physical life from us at the first death, also has the power to resurrect us and, if we have been disobedient, to cast us into the lake of fire -- (the second death -- from which

there will be no hope of a resurrection -- from which we can never come to life again.

Man can kill our bodies but he can do no more.

We have already reckoned our lives dead upon baptism. The new life we now live is by the faith of Jesus Christ in us. "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). Jesus brings out the great importance of the fact that the first or natural life (soul) of a Christian is already perished. There is nothing of that life which remains for men to kill

That is why Jesus declared that man can kill the body, but not the soul or life. We are figuratively dead already -- our physical way of life is crucified. But the life of Christ in us can't be touched by man; he cannot kill it because it is Christ's very own life. Although the original word for "eternal life" is from another Greek word, Jesus uses psuche -- soul or material life -- because Christ is living His life in our material bodies.

LETTER ANSWERING DEPARTMENT