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# fromdeathtolife

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**life · death · resurrection · eternal destinies · bible teaching**

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# Why I've started reading Spurgeon again

by Jefferson Vann

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was a 19th century English Baptist “prince of preachers” whose writings (mostly collections of his sermons and devotions) are still highly valued by Christians today. I remember taking up reading Spurgeon years ago, but finally gave it up in disgust.

I just could not handle his constant references to heaven as the hope of the saints. As a conditionalist, I do not believe that heaven is my hope. I believe that Jesus Christ is my hope. I don't expect to go to heaven. I expect my saviour to come from heaven. There is a difference.

I also do not believe that human beings have an immortal soul that continues to live in a state of conscious awareness between the time the body dies and is resurrected at the coming of Christ. I believe the whole person dies, and remains in an unconscious sleep state until awakened by Christ on resurrection day.

Spurgeon believed that human beings have an immortal element which remains conscious and very alive during this state. His references to “man's immortal nature” were to me a flat denial of God's exclusive immortality, as taught in scripture. So, as a consequence, my attempts at reading Spurgeon were few and far between.

I have come back to Spurgeon – not because my beliefs have changed. I am still a card-carrying conditionalist, and all my studies in the Bible – even translating large sections of it – have not served to cast any doubt on the doctrines of life only in Christ.

I have come back to Spurgeon because his writings are the works of a committed Christian, and as such, are worth a read.

I have come back to Spurgeon because he had a masterful way of showing the practical nature of spiritual things, and showing how the whole story of the Bible applies

to the Christian's everyday life. I have come back to Spurgeon because I need encouragement in the Scriptures. I have had my fill of "self-help" Christianity, and it has soured in my stomach. Spurgeon believed that the scriptures themselves can be the Christian's source of encouragement. Such was the conviction of another great Christian: the apostle Paul:

Romans 15:4 (my translation)  
Because everything that was written in former times was written to teach us, so that as we endure and stay encouraged by the scriptures we may keep our hope.

Now that I'm reading Spurgeon again, I find my mind is more consistently thinking about spiritual things, and less likely to be distracted by worldly concerns. I find my memory bringing up texts of scripture instead of weird miscellany or doubts and fears. Praying is coming easier. Sinning is harder. It's like I have found a Christian friend to walk with me and counsel me as I go through hard times.

Thank you, Lord, for my brother Charles.

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**Jefferson Vann is a Christian missionary, church elder, father of three, grandfather of five, and a very grateful citizen of God's kingdom. You can find his writing at JeffersonVann.com, Marmsky.com and Afterlife.co.nz.**

# Refuting Calvin's Psychopannychia

(Part 1)

by David Tatum

John Calvin was a French theologian, a pastor, and someone who had a major influence during the Protestant Reformation.

Calvin published his small book *Psychopannychia* in 1534 when he was only 25 years old. In his work, Calvin claims that the early church father Eusebius is responsible for the following statement “the soul dies with the body and that both rise again at the Day of Judgment.” He claims that this idea began with Eusebius and has now begun to spark up interest by the group called the Anabaptists. (pg 6)

Calvin titled his work *Psychopannychia*, which means “the sleep of the soul” because it is a refutation of those that believe the soul either ceases to exist or sleeps upon bodily death. In addition, he added the extremely long subtitle; “or, a refutation of the error entertained by some unskillful persons, who ignorantly imagine that in the interval



*Portrait of John Calvin*

between death and the judgment the soul sleeps. Together with an explanation of the condition and life of the soul after this present life.” Calvin saw himself as protecting the church against heresy or false teaching. While his heart may have been in the right place, it doesn't seem that he always approached his opponents with a loving manner. He repeatedly attacks their character appealing to their lack of knowledge and at one point refers

to them as the “nefarious herd of Anabaptists”. (pg 7)

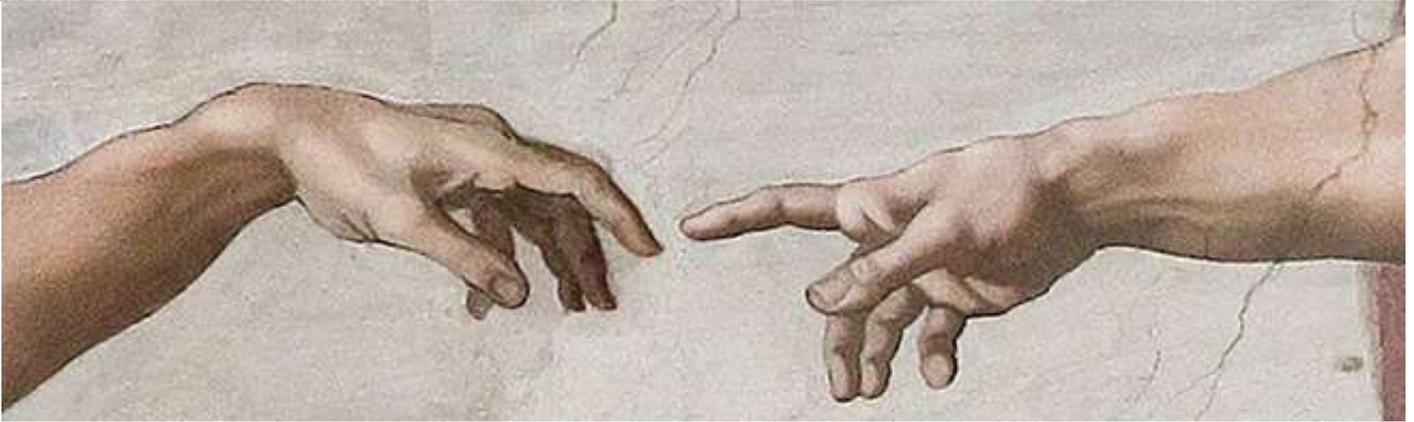
In Calvin’s writing, he recognised the Biblical debate between the Pharisees and Sadducees in regards to the afterlife and the resurrection of the body. He mentions the early church father Tertullian five times in his book and Augustine of Hippo seven times. Calvin seems to be highly influenced by both church fathers. This makes perfect sense considering that both Tertullian and Augustine were the largest proponents for the immortality of the soul, and both helped to

establish it as the doctrine of the developing Catholic church. While Calvin reacted against the Catholic church theologically in several other areas, he sided with the Catholic church in regards to the immortality of the soul. Calvin never mentions Martin Luther, who held and taught the idea of soul sleep prior to the Anabaptists adopting the teaching, but it seems that he may have had him in mind in writing this book. Luther had previously written:

“As soon as thy eyes have closed shalt thou be woken, a thousand years shall be as if thou hadst slept but a little half



*Consecration of Saint Augustine by Jaume Huguet (1412-1492)*



hour. Just as at night we hear the clock strike and know not how long we have slept, so too, and how much more, are in death a thousand years soon past. Before a man should turn round, he is already a fair angel.” (Luther, Martin, WA, 37.191)

While it would take a much larger response to address every argument and scripture Calvin either promotes for his view or uses to refute against it, what follows will be an attempt to address several of the key foundational issues that underline Calvin’s main arguments. We will examine how Calvin was highly influenced by Platonic philosophy and derived his understanding of Biblical anthropology from him. We will see that while Calvin is willing to concede that Biblically speaking animals have souls, or more accurately are referred to as living creatures (both *nephesh* and *psuche*), he proposes the Greek

philosophical understanding of the rational soul solves this issue.

Calvin makes a critical error confusing the words spirit and soul, using them interchangeably and failing to recognise their distinctiveness. As any theologian who affirms substance dualism forced to do, he is left with no choice but to redefine the very meaning of death itself. Calvin seems to believe that his appeal to the ‘Imagio Dei’, (man being made in the image and likeness of God) is his trump card that can refute any opposing argument. What Calvin fails to recognise is that this argument is very easily refuted when scripture is read in context and when his argument is extrapolated out beyond just the idea of the immortality of the soul.

Calvin claims that Christ is the model of our death and resurrection, which all Christians

should be able to affirm. When he applies his anthropology to Christ, death is no longer truly an enemy and is not complete in scope; it is a small roadblock in transitioning to a new form of life and a closer existence to God's presence. Calvin, along with others ironically appeals to Jesus' interaction with the Sadducees and declares that because God is not the God of the dead but the living, that all must be alive. As Tyndale has famously pointed out, this argument negates Jesus' entire appeal to the Sadducees that there must be a resurrection of the dead. Finally, Calvin uses several standard 'proof texts' that have been used to appeal for the justification of both an intermediate state and the

immortality of the soul.

### **Calvin's Platonic View of the Soul:**

In his work, Calvin proposes a Platonic view of the immortal soul. This should come as no surprise, seeing that he was highly influenced by Augustine. Calvin says elsewhere:

“If I were inclined to compile a whole volume from Augustine, I could easily show my readers, that I need no words but his” (Institutes, Book III, chap. 22)

Augustine highly influenced Calvin, and in turn, Augustine was highly influenced by the Greek philosopher Plato. Augustine once said:



“It is evident that none come nearer to us than the Platonists.” (Augustine-City of God, Book 8, Ch 5)

As Calvin lays out his understanding of the soul, he echoes the Platonic sentiments that the soul is a substance separate from the body and that it survives bodily death. Calvin says that the soul is a “substance distinct from the body”. (pg 17). He also states that “the body, which decays, weighs down the soul”. (pg 34) Because the body is seen as a hindrance to the soul, Calvin thinks that “the body is the prison of the soul”. (pg 34) Calvin’s says that the Anabaptists do not believe in a conscious existence or state of being between death and resurrection. Calvin states:

“we, on the other hand, maintain both that it (the soul) is a substance, and after the death of the body truly lives, being endued both with sense and understanding.” (pg 11)

Calvin believes that we are souls inhabiting a body. Upon death, the body dies, and the soul lives on. For him, the soul is an outer shell of the true self. Again, he says:

“This, if you attend to it, you must see to apply to the soul, which dwells in a

clay body. He did not call man a vessel of clay, but says that he inhabits a vessel of clay, as if the good part of man (which is the soul) were contained in that earthly abode.” (pg 15)

For the sake of clarity, Calvin emphasises his main point and leaves the reader no room for doubt concerning his aim in writing the book. Calvin believes that the soul is immortal and does not die or sleep when the body dies.

“For I come to The Second Head, which I propose to discuss, viz., that the soul, after the death of the body, still survives, endued with sense and intellect. And it is a mistake to suppose that I am here affirming anything else than the immortality of the soul.” (pg 17) {emphasis mine}

### **Animals Have Souls:**

Calvin admits that all animals are called “souls” Biblically speaking and that all animals also have the “breath of life”. (pg 41) However, Calvin appeals to the idea that there are different kinds of souls. This is a line of argument that is found in both Plato and Aristotle, but this delineation is never made within the Biblical language.

Scripture never distinguishes between an animal and human nephesh or psuche. The Greek understanding of the soul was that the soul could be differentiated by the ability of the animal, humans having the highest level as a result of their rational and cognitive abilities. Therefore, the reason is Calvin's rebuttal the problem that both animals and human have souls.

Calvin says, "seeing, then, that the soul of man possesses reason, intellect, and will – qualities which are not annexed to the body – it is not wonderful that it subsists without the body, and does not perish like the brutes." (pg 41) In this case, Calvin has no Biblical scripture to quote or to back up his claim. He appeals to the notion that humans have the ability to reason and therefore, they must have an



immortal soul. He makes a logical jump without being able to support his argument with scripture. As a result, his argument is lacking, to say the least.

### **Confusing the Words Spirit and Soul:**

Throughout his work, Calvin intermingles the two words soul and spirit. At times he wants to use them as synonymous, and at other times he chooses to make a distinction between them. Calvin fails to recognise that the two words are distinct in the Bible. The Hebrew and Greek words for spirit are never translated into the English word soul, not a single time in any of our modern translations of the Bible. And yet Calvin states, “when the two terms are joined, “soul” means will, and “spirit” means intellect.” (pg 13)

Any time the word soul is used in context with death, Calvin wants to argue that “soul is there used metonymically for life” (pg 12) This allows him to pick and choose when to use the word soul as a substance that survives death or when it is simply to be translated as the word ‘life’. For instance, he

appeals to Matthew 10:28 but doesn’t see there that a soul can die.

Calvin sees both Jesus and Stephens deaths (Luke 23:4,6; Psalm 31:6, Acts 7:59.) as their spirit returning to God (also citing Ecc 12:7) but in order to do this he has to translate the Greek word *pneuma* meaning spirit into the Greek word *psuche*. Scripture doesn’t have a single instance where this is done in translation, but Calvin seems to justify in order to prove his theological bias.

**(Continued in Issue 82)**



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## Statement of Faith

1. We believe in God and His one and only Son, Jesus the Christ. Heb. 11:6; John 14:1; 3:16; 20:31; Mat. 16:16.
2. We believe in the Holy Spirit. 2Pet. 1:21; 1Cor. 6:19; Jude 20; Eph. 3:5.
3. We believe that Jesus died for us and gave himself a ransom for all. Rom. 5:8; 1Cor. 15:3; 1Tim. 2:6.
4. We believe that God raised Jesus from the dead; that by resurrection He became Lord of both the dead and the living, and the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep; and that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. Rom. 10:9; 14:9; 1Cor. 15:20; John 3:16.
5. We believe that baptism is commanded by Christ, was practiced by His Apostles, and is taught in the New Testament. Mat. 28:18,19; Acts 8:12,38.
6. We believe that all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the people of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2Tim. 3:16,17.
7. We believe that human beings are by nature mortal. Gen. 2:7; 3:19; 1Tim. 6:16; 2Tim. 1:10; Rom. 2:6-7.
8. We believe that human beings in death are unconscious. Psa. 6:5; 115:17; Ecc. 9:5,10. This is likened to "sleep". Job 14:12; Psa. 13:3; Jer. 51:39; Dan. 12:2; John 11:11-14; 1Cor. 15:51.
9. We believe that immortality is obtained only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. 1Cor. 15:21-23; 2Tim. 4:7-8; 1John 5:9-12.
10. We believe that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked, to be followed by the Judgment. Acts 24:15; John 5:25,28,29; Rev 20:12,13.
11. We believe that evil and evil-doers shall be finally destroyed. Psa. 145:20; Mat. 10:28 Rom. 6:21; Phil. 3:19; Heb. 2:14; 1John 3:8; Rev. 22:3.
12. We believe in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Acts 1:11; John 14:3; 1Thes. 4:16.