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### **Cover Image:** Spring Flowers

Let us acknowledge the Lord;  
let us press on to acknowledge him.  
As surely as the sun rises,  
he will appear;  
he will come to us like the winter rains,  
like the spring rains that water the earth.”

Hosea 6:3

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# Rethinking Hell Update

by Peter Grice

Christian greetings to all our friends and partners in New Zealand and beyond! As I write this update to you all on the activities of Rethinking Hell in recent months, I am sitting at home in Australia watching a live video stream from Washington state in the USA. It's the very first episode of our new weekly show, Rethinking Hell Live. Thanks to the amazing technology and superb host in Chris Date, it's going very well!

The focus of this episode is to respond to well-known apologist and philosopher, William Lane Craig. Craig recently came to conclude something we conditionalists take for granted: that Adam was created mortal, and through sin failed to meet the condition for immortality (Craig cites Gen 3:22 on this point). This

view about first things leads logically to a conditionalist view of last things, we would argue, so it's provided us with an ideal opportunity to engage with this significant evangelical thinker. In the live video format our host is including video clips of Craig speaking about topics like resurrection, hell, and eternal life, and also responding to questions from viewers in real-time!

The more dynamic and interactive approach will help us to connect with new audiences, and continue to grow our support base, God-willing. In case you'd like to tune in to the show live, in your timezone it starts at 1pm each Tuesday (see [rethinkinghell.com/live](http://rethinkinghell.com/live)). Each show is also being recorded, so can be watched afterwards.

Last month we had our yearly



conference in Oklahoma, with a theme of Hell and the Gospel. The conference was very well-received by those in attendance, and also praised by speakers for its spirit of fellowship and sincere biblical inquiry, despite different and controversial views being presented. Naturally, we provided a robust defense of conditional immortality, but we also solicited criticism, for instance in the form of Dr. Marvin Jones' critique of Edward Fudge's work. As with Dr. Gregg Allison's gentle caution the previous year against departing from consensus views in theology, such offerings can make us conditionalists feel a little uncomfortable. But I firmly believe that welcoming them is a sign of a healthy and maturing movement, and an important part of advancing the evangelical conversation.

I appreciated a keynote talk by Dr. Johnathan Pritchett, who was generous to our view but is himself still in the process of reconsidering his traditionalist stance. His central point was that we need to create conditions in the debate where being "on the fence" is OK.

That's roughly what we mean by inviting fellow evangelicals to "rethink," even as we trust that our strong advocacy for conditionalism will help draw many over the fence in due course.

We are seeing some of that fruit, as more and more people inform us that they've embraced conditionalism. Some of them are church pastors and other ministry workers, whose situation can be sensitive once they do so, or even sooner, once they begin to question the received view. It's not uncommon for concerns in a given church context to prompt meetings in which a conditionalist is able to present their case to others. We are there to help them prepare, and support them as needed. But much wisdom is needed in this area, so your prayers for this aspect of our work would be appreciated.

Thanks again for all your support and encouragement. We continue to pray for your work in this area, and I look forward to updating you again as things progress!

***Peter Grice***

**Rethinking Hell**

# Refuting Calvin's Psychopannychia

by David Tatum

(Continued from Issue 82)

## The Redefinition of Death:

Anyone arguing for the concept of the immortal soul will have to redefine the basic and common definition of the word 'death'. However, it is not just this word but other Biblical words such as perish, consume, destroy and others that all refer to the cessation of life. Calvin understands this. For example, when the soul is associated with death in the following texts, he sees this as pertaining only to the body. However, scripture never makes that distinction in death, not once.

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die," (Ezekiel 28:4)

"The soul which turneth aside to wizards and soothsayers shall die the death," (Leviticus 20:6)

In the same way, Calvin says he has heard the argument that Adam and Eve became mortal after sinning in the garden. His



*Portrait of John Calvin*

opponents quote texts such as;

"dying ye shall die." (Genesis 2:17)

"The wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23)

"The soul that sinneth shall die." (Ezekiel 18:4)

"Dust thou art, and to dust shalt thou return," (Gen 3:19)

"Remember how thou hast made me of clay, and will reduce me to dust." (Job 10:9.)

Calvin makes a strange move in responding to these texts claiming that in these cases, the death of the

soul means loss of God's presence. "Would you know what the death of the soul is? It is to be without God – to be abandoned by God, and left to itself: for if God is its life, it loses its life when it loses the presence of God." (pg 45). This leaves the reader with obvious questions such as how can one be separated from the presence of a God who is omnipresent.

Calvin's attempts to redefine death only end up causing more problems theologically. He even goes so far as to claim that all references to death as sleep are a form of synecdoche where the whole is sometimes taken for a part (pg 49). This allows him to bifurcate humanity and say that what the texts 'really means' is that the body sleeps, but the soul lives on after death. Again, this is a distinction that scripture never makes.

### **Calvin Sees the Imago Dei as His Trump Card:**

Calvin seems to think that the Imago Dei is his ultimate trump card: He can always appeal to it in order to win the theological debate regarding the immortality of the

soul. For Calvin, it is simple math.

"We are made in the image of God" (Genesis 1:16)

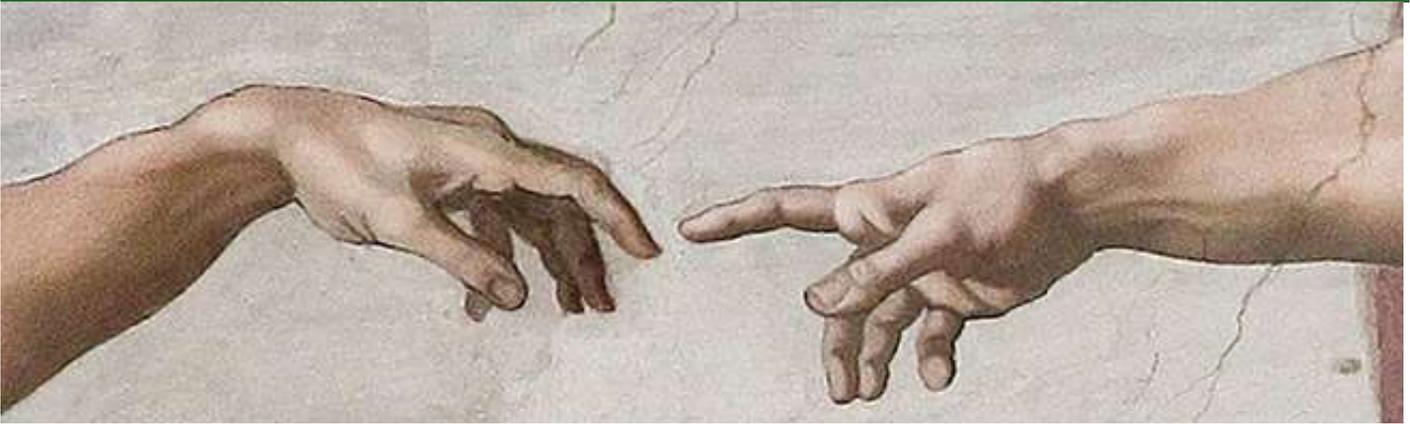
#### **And**

"God himself, is a Spirit, and cannot be represented by any bodily shape" (pg 13)

#### **So**

We have an immaterial spirit/soul within us that is also immortal Calvin's states, "yet that seat of the image of God always remains safe, whether they call it "soul" or "spirit," or give it any other name." (pg 43). Again, we see him confusing the two Biblical terms of soul and spirit. The problem for Calvin's argument is that the image or likeness of God is never tied to humanity having a spirit or soul because animals are called souls and are also given spirit or breath. The Imago Dei instead is connected to man's vocation, his mandate to rule and reign over God's creation as God's co-regent on earth.

Calvin's line of argument fails on two accounts. First, the image of God is not connected to the immortality of God or the human soul. Instead of being made



in the image of God is connected to having dominion over God's creation. God created mankind to rule and reign over the earth. Scripture says:

“Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” (Genesis 1:26)

Second, Calvin's line of reasoning fails because when it is extrapolated further, it cannot be sustained. Calvin's line of thought is that mankind is made in the image of God and God is immortal; therefore man must be immortal as well. But when we begin to apply other attributes of God to this form of reasoning, the logic becomes absurd. We could also propose that mankind is made in the image and likeness of God and that God is

omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. I doubt that Calvin would be willing to concede that mankind also possesses these and other attributes commonly associated with God. While it may sound like a great argument on the surface, it does not hold water when applied against scripture or reason.

### **Christ Our Model for Death:**

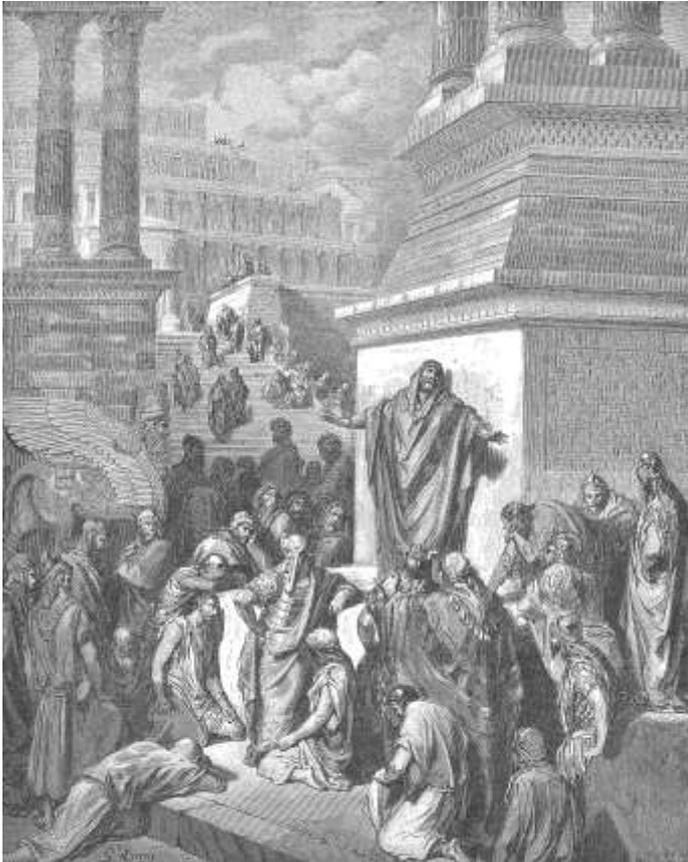
Potentially Calvin's strongest argument is that Christ is our model for both death and resurrection. On this point, every Christian should be able to agree wholeheartedly. He says, just “as he died and rose again, so do we also die and rise again.” (pg 26). Calvin then adds that Jesus has life in himself so he cannot die, at least not completely. Death for Calvin is only a separating of the body from the soul; half of the person dies (the body) and the

other half (the soul) lives on after death. Calvin argues, just “as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he has given to the Son to have life in himself.” (John 5:26.) Just a few pages later Calvin expounds on this idea more.

“yet he has it not of himself, as he elsewhere declares that he lives by the Father. And though as God he had life in himself, yet when he assumed human nature, he received from the Father the gift of having life in himself in that nature also. These things give us the fullest assurance that Christ could not be extinguished by death,

even in respect of his human nature; and that although he was truly and naturally delivered to the death which we all undergo, he, however, always retained the gift of the Father. True! death was a separation of soul and body. But the soul never lost its life. Having been commended to the Father it could not but be safe.” (pg 28)

Adding to this idea, Calvin appeals to Jesus words concerning his analogy of his death to Jonah’s time in the belly of a fish. For him, Jonah proves as a type that we exist as a soul after death. Calvin says, “another proof of the immortality of his soul was given us by our Saviour when he made the confinement of Jonah three days within the whale’s belly to be a type of his death.” (pg 28). There are several problems with this argument. First, this requires a literal reading of the book of Jonah, which some scholars say is meant as an allegory and is not to be taken as historical fact. Even if the book of Jonah is to be taken as a historical account, there is also debate as to whether or not Jonah died in the belly of the fish and was later resurrected after being spit out. Language in the second



*Jonah Preaching to the Ninevites (1866)*  
by Gustave Doré

chapter of the book certainly leads us to believe this was a possibility. Finally, even if Jonah did not die in the belly of the fish, Jesus use of this reference does not demand that the metaphor be stretched to mean that Jesus was alive as a disembodied spirit while his body lay in the tomb. The farthest that we should take this metaphor is to mean that like Jonah, who spent three days and three nights in a fish, Jesus spent three days and nights in a tomb. The metaphor works because the time frame is the same. When stretch it seems to break down because Jonah was alive in a fish and Jesus was dead in a tomb.

It might be conceded that Calvin's argument would solve all further dispute if his anthropology was correct. However, it is not, so he fails to understand the incarnation of Christ, who became fully human for our sake. Paul explains that Jesus literally went through a metamorphosis in the process of becoming a human being. Jesus was in the form (Greek-morphe) of God but humbled himself and took the form (morphe) of a man. In

doing such a thing, Jesus divested himself of his immortality and became a mortal human susceptible to death. Paul says:

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

**Pre-incarnation:**

who, although He existed in the form of God,

did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

**Incarnation:**

but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant,

and being made in the likeness of men.

Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself

**Death:**

by becoming obedient to the point of death,

even death on a cross.

**Resurrection:**

For this reason, also, God highly exalted Him,

and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,

**Glorification:**

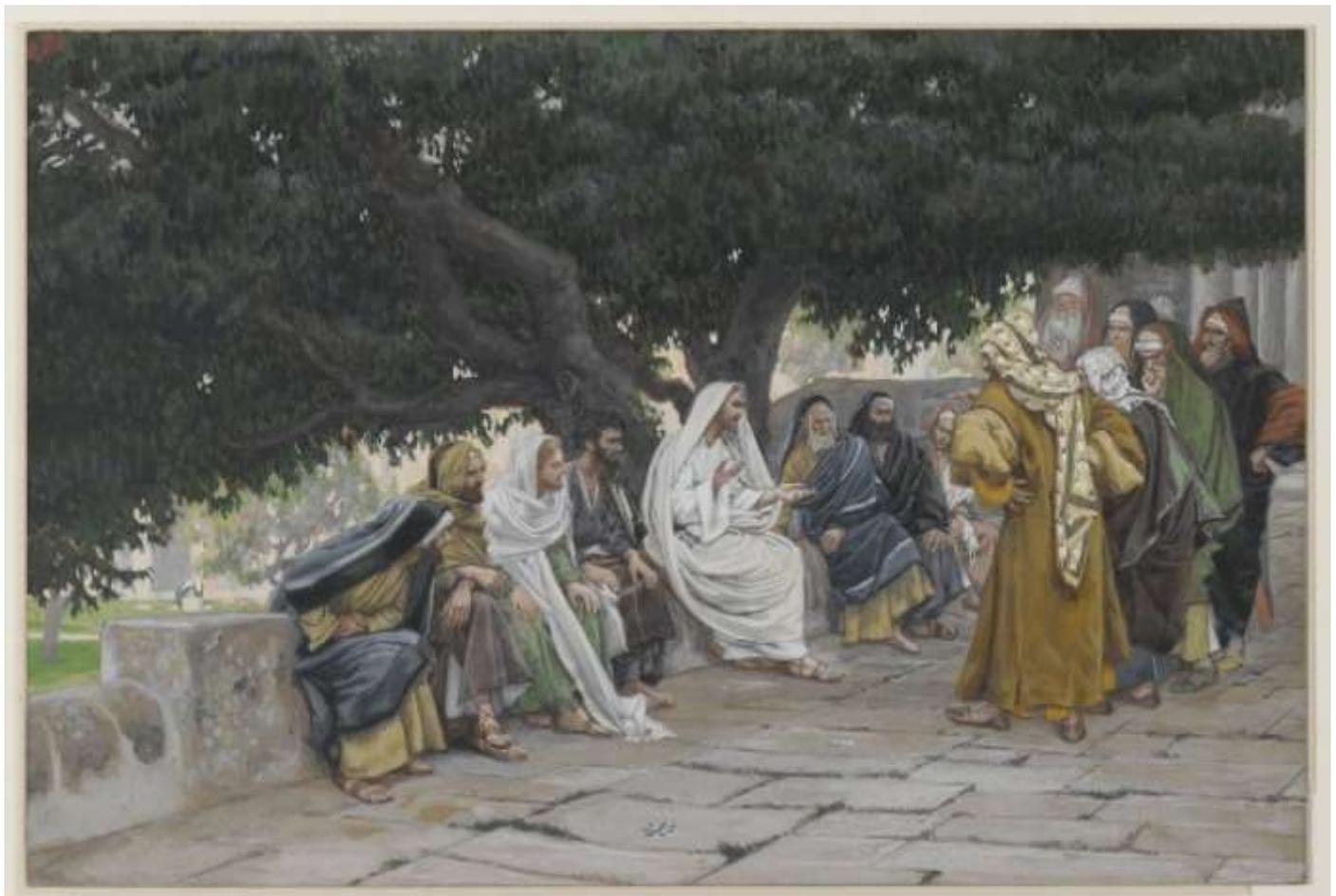
so that at the name of Jesus every

knee will bow,  
of those who are in heaven and on  
earth and under the earth,  
and that every tongue will confess  
that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the  
Father.” (Philippians 2:5-11)

To say that Christ only partially  
died also seems to bring up  
potential problems for any view of  
the atonement which holds to  
substitution.

### **God of the Dead and the Living:**

Calvin appeals to Jesus encounter  
with the Sadducees in which he  
told them that he is “not God of  
the dead but the living” (Mathew  
12:32) to prove that the dead  
must somehow still be alive. He  
takes Luke’s statement that “all  
live to him” (Luke 30:28) to be  
proof that the dead are still alive  
somewhere. He says that “it  
follows, therefore, that Abraham,



*The Pharisees and the Sadducees Come to Tempt Jesus - James Tissot*

Isaac, and Jacob are alive.” (pg 36). Calvin references Paul to try and further prove his point. He thinks that Paul’s statement “for this Christ both died and rose again, that he might be Lord of the living and the dead” helps further prove his point. (Romans 14:8-9).

However, what Calvin fails to see is that Paul speaks of death and then life ‘after’ being resurrected and not an intermediate state. In addition, Jesus when talking to the Sadducees uses the phrase “he is not God of the dead but the living” to prove the resurrection precisely because these people are dead and need to rise again. Calvin unknowingly reverses Jesus intended statement and strips him of the very argument he was trying to make with the Sadducees. If the Israelite fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are not dead but living, the resurrection is not necessary.

### **Standard Proof Texts:**

Besides the major arguments already discussed, Calvin’s Psychopannychia appeals to several other Biblical texts to make his case for the immortality of the soul. He mentions that he has heard the

argument against his position that judgment is reserved for the last day. (pg 54) Following this, he does not provide a very satisfactory explanation as to how this is not negated by an intermediate state that involves judgement and separation of the righteous and the wicked. In his understanding, then, there must be an initial judgement that takes place upon death, and a secondary judgment that happens after Christ’s return and the resurrection of the dead occurs. He later appeals to the historical argument which has been that souls are in paradise, or heaven, resting peacefully. (pg 60)

Calvin refers to Jesus’ parable of the ‘Rich man and Lazarus’ claiming that it must be a historical account and not a parable because Lazarus is named. Here he provides a rule for deciphering history from parable but has no way of justifying why this rule should be followed. He also states that “sleep” as it has pertained to death elsewhere in the Bible, is just a metaphor for being at peace in Abrahams bosom. Calvin wants to

take the narrative that Jesus provided to the Pharisees out of its literary context in order to justify his theology. This becomes problematic when on one hand, he wants to say the account is historical and on the other has no way of justifying how in the parable both the Rich man and Lazarus seem to be embodied and are able to experience suffering and pain.

Calvin also draws attention to Christ's encounter with the thief on the cross to justify the immortal soul and a disembodied intermediate state. Because Jesus told the thief "today shalt thou be with me in paradise", (Luke 22:42) this is all the proof Calvin needs to show that men survived death. But this quickly becomes problematic for his timeline because Calvin also wants to confess that Jesus went to Hades as both Peter and Paul affirm in the book of Acts. This places him firmly in line with the Catholic teaching of the 'Harrowing of Hell'. Jesus words to the thief actually fit the theology of his opponents better, when understood that this man will not

experience time between death and resurrection. This also fits with the Biblical picture of Paradise being a physical place in both Genesis and Revelation. Calvin, on the other hand, cannot explain how Paradise which is understood to be the garden of God on earth, can also be in either Hades or Heaven, or how a physical place is also a place for disembodied souls.

Calvin sees death as the separation of the body and soul, so naturally, he appeals to Paul's words to the church in Corinth when Paul said, to be "absent from the body and present with Lord". (2 Cor 5). Calvin says "we desire indeed to depart from this prison of the body, but not to wander uncertain without a home." (pg 33). For Paul, however, the home he longs for is the resurrected body not a disembodied Platonic state of existence.

Calvin believes that after death, Jesus went to preach to the spirits which he understands to be disembodied people, in prison

and sees the justification for this idea in the apostle Peter's letters. (1 Peter 3:18-19, 4:6) He says, "Christ in spirit preached to those other spirits who were in prison – in other words, that the virtue of the redemption obtained by Christ appeared and was exhibited to the spirits of the dead." (pg 19). The problem with Calvin's exegesis is that the term 'spirits' is not used to refer to human beings but angels or fallen angels Biblically speaking. If

humans are to be called 'spiritual beings' at all it is not justifiably until after their resurrection and glorification. Paul's Magna Carta on the resurrection of the dead found in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 tells us that it is not until after we are resurrected that we will bear the image of the heavenly.

Finally, Calvin appeals to the book of Revelation for support of his view. He says that the souls of the



*"Christ and the Thief" by Nikolai Ge*

martyrs under the altar (Revelation 6:10-11) show us that humans must be in heaven as disembodied spirits. Calvin rightly recognises that there is an argument to be made regarding this text in relation to Abel's blood that is said to cry out to God. Just as we don't actually believe that Abel's blood was making audible sounds crying out to God, we are not meant to think that John means these martyrs are actually stuck under an altar in heaven crying out to God as disembodied spirits awaiting their revenge. But Calvin says that this is precisely how we should understand this text. There is some irony in Calvin's use of this text to justify his theology. The text itself says that John sees the psuche or souls that have been slain. For Calvin, a soul cannot be slain or killed because it is immortal, but that is exactly what John explains that he is seeing, souls that have been killed.

## Conclusion

In regards to this matter, it would have behoved the young John Calvin to side with his reformation fathers Martin Luther

and William Tyndale rather than the Catholic church. His disdain for the Anabaptists may have partially blinded him to the truth. It may have also been his infatuation with Augustine that caused him to build his anthropological foundation on Platonic dualism that which in turn did not allow him to read scripture without the lens of substance dualism. Calvin's Biblical attempt to justify the immortal soul is robust, but at the end of the day is found lacking.

What we have seen is that scripture never makes a distinction between humans and animals in regards to the language of the soul. Calvin must appeal to Platonic philosophy for justification in those regards. Calvin mixed the language of spirit and soul when it was convenient for him and separated them when it was not. In an attempt to justify his anthropology, Calvin must redefine the very meaning of death itself. Death no longer becomes the cessation of life and the return to the dust as God promises but the separation of

body and soul. His appeal to mankind being made in the image of God as a means to justify the immortal soul does not hold water. Calvin rightfully appeals to Christ as our paradigm for death and resurrecting but fails to put the incarnation of Jesus into the correct framework of Biblical anthropology.

In conclusion, the Bible nowhere attributes immortality to humanity but instead mortality and the inevitability of death. On the contrary to Calvin's appeal, scripture explicitly states that only God possesses immortality. Calvin's strongest evidence for an intermediate state between death and resurrection is found in a parable that he attempts to justify as a historical account. Scripture also nowhere states that humanity is going to heaven. On the contrary, it does say that Jesus will return in the same way he came to resurrect the dead and dwell on the earth.



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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.