



## HOW DO I BECOME IMMORTAL?

Adam was created with a nature that would have been made immortal if he had been obedient, but everything went wrong. The result was that he and his wife became subject to death and all their descendants, including all of us, are mortal. It's natural for us to sin, because we are born with a tendency in that direction, and it's therefore inevitable that we will die, sooner or later, because sin kills. The only thing we don't know is *when* that fate will overtake us. Will it be sooner or later? We can't be sure!

We came to this understanding as we worked through Romans and followed the apostle Paul's explanation about why we are all subject to sin and are all destined to die. Then he added that there was a prospect of eternal life: God is willing to give us life that would last for ever and the life which is on offer is not just everlasting life but a wonderful life in complete harmony with God. We can become members of the family of God, adopted children, who have a wonderfully close and meaningful relationship with Almighty God.

Here are just two Scriptures to remind us of the progress we make in our spiritual journey by learning to understand the Bible for ourselves:

*“Now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but **the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord**” (Romans 6:22,23);*

*“For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but **you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God**” (Romans 8:13-16).*

The baptism of a true believer is the first step towards becoming immortal. It starts our new life – life with God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul calls this new relationship *“life according to the Spirit”* (Romans 8:4) and we have discovered that means life:

- ✓ with meaning and purpose; which is
- ✓ in conformity with the Word of God, and is
- ✓ in line with the gracious promises God has made for all those who become *“heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ”* (Romans 8:17).

### ❖ God's Gift to Us

When you think about it, the Bible is like an ancient map which shows us just where to go to find an immense treasure. Jesus once told a parable about a man who came across buried riches as he was digging in the field, as a result of which he sold everything he had to buy that field and make the treasure his own. You may have stumbled across this course and are working through it out of curiosity. If so you are like that man; for you have stumbled across an inheritance that can be yours, if you are prepared to do what is needed. Or you may have been keenly looking for the way to find eternal life. Either way you might have realised by now that the gift of immortality is the most wonderful offer from God. But how does it come about? How can we get it for ourselves?

Baptism starts the process because it requires us to make a formal declaration that we want a new life. That life then continues as we start to change the way we think – that's the crucial next step. Paul describes it in lots of different ways, as we have seen. He:

- ✓ calls it life *“according to the Spirit”* (8:4);
- ✓ says that we should *“set the mind on the Spirit”* (8:6);
- ✓ tells us to live *“in the Spirit”* (8:9), or *“by the Spirit”* (8:13);
- ✓ says we are to have the Spirit dwell in us (8:9,14), and
- ✓ urges us to cultivate *“the mind of the Spirit”* (8:27).

### ❖ “In Adam” or “In Christ”?

What Paul is really saying is this. We were born *“in Adam”* and we have now started a new life *“in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 8:1,2). This change of status is the difference between eternal life and eternal death for, as Paul says in another letter:

*“As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive”* (1 Corinthians 15:22).

This is a bit like changing families. It's as if you had been adopted by someone else and left the home where you had lived all your life so far, by going to live with another family. How would you feel inside about such a change? It's that feeling inside us that Paul is considering – the change that should take place in our minds. He reminds us that we haven't been taken into the new household as a slave but as an adopted son or daughter. Notice his actual words:

*“All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received **the Spirit of adoption as sons**, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Romans 8:14,15).*

Instead of saying “you have been adopted as sons”, he says we have received the “*spirit of adoption as sons*” and he contrasts this with “*the spirit of slavery*”. In other words we shouldn't *feel* or *think* like a slave, but as a child of God; and one who has a very close and intimate relationship with his or her father. Paul's concern is about what's in our mind or spirit – what is happening inside us. He wants us to think right and feel right with God.

*“For those who live according to the flesh set their **minds** on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their **minds** on the things of the Spirit. To set the **mind** on the flesh is death, but to set the **mind** on the Spirit is life and peace. For the **mind** that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot” (Romans 8:5-7).*

### ❖ Christ in Us

If we can learn to think like the Lord Jesus Christ and be motivated by those things that directed his life – by things that please God – it will be as though the life of Jesus was continuing on earth, inside us. That's what Paul means when he says this:

*“Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if **Christ is in you**, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness” (Romans 8:9,10).*

This is an exalted thought because, try as we might, none of us is going to be able to live as perfectly as Jesus lived. His was a life of total dedication and complete commitment. He never did or said anything wrong, nor did he break any of the laws of God. We cannot ever hope to achieve that standard, but when we try our best to live the life of Christ as members of the family of God, it is another vital step in the process of receiving immortality. For, if we want to become immortal like Jesus we must first learn to think like him, to love the things that he loved, and to follow the example that he left us. It was the apostle John who said this:

*“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called **children of God**; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, **we are God's children now**, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears **we will be like him**, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:1-3).*

Just to want this outcome – to be like the Lord Jesus – is a purifying thought, it helps to transform us from Adam to Christ. It all starts in the mind. But it is not just left to us to do the best we can.

### ❖ God is for Us

In one of the most uplifting parts of the letter, Paul says that God is working with us to ensure our salvation. He has not left us on our own but works in many different ways to finish what He has begun in us. If we have become His children and now live with Him, He also lives with us. That means that His great power and might are active to help us and that He will work with us. If we are related, through baptism, to the Lord Jesus he also is active on our behalf. For Scripture says that:

*“He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25).*

Neither God nor Jesus can do it all for us; we have to do our part. They will not take over our minds and think for us, nor will they manipulate our minds so that we think as they want. If God had wanted robots He would have created them. Instead He created men and women who can think for themselves. Thus God gave us the chance of showing our appreciation and affection by voluntarily choosing to do the things that please Him.

That's the choice we all now have and it's up to each of us whether we want to bother about God and His purpose, or not. He loves us, but nobody forces us to love Him in return; it's up to us. But if we are keen to show God that we care, and that we really want what is on offer, this is what He will do for us:

**“For those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose ... If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ... In all these things **we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.** For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, **nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord**” (Romans 8:28-39).**

God can do more for us than we can even imagine and the Lord Jesus Christ will be at the right hand of God interceding for us, because he also loves us. Baptized believers are promised a life in fellowship with God and the Lord Jesus, and this will be a loving and caring relationship, which is part of the process of being saved and being made holy. It starts in the mind, which has to be changed, and it requires constant recourse to the Word of God and prayer, so that the entire life changes direction.

Paul says a lot more about this change in Romans chapters 12 to 16 – which is directly concerned with our behaviour and way of life. Here’s just a glimpse of what he says there:

*“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect**” (Romans 12:1,2).*

In this passage the apostle doesn’t talk about “*the Spirit*”, but about having our minds transformed and renewed to understand the will of God. It’s the same process that he described in Romans 8, just different language. His point in the earlier chapter is that we have to choose to live life on a higher plane – a spiritual one. Almighty God is a spirit being; so we must try to aspire to higher things – to “*the new life of the Spirit*” (Romans 7:6).

#### ❖ **Salvation from Sin**

It follows that being saved is not something that happens overnight; it is a process that takes a lifetime. Baptism is certainly an event, and a crucially important one at that, but it is the beginning of a new journey not the end of the road. As Paul says in Romans:

*“I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God **for salvation** to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16);*

*“Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more **shall we be saved** by him from the wrath of God” (5:9);*

*“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, **shall we be saved by his life**” (5:10);*

*“For **in this hope we were saved.** Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?” (8:24).*

When the Bible talks about “*hope*”, it means something real and powerful: a firmly-based hope which is rooted in the promises of God. In this context, the apostle describes how such a hope is destined to become a reality. He explains that God will confer the gift of immortality upon those people who live the life of the Spirit: all those who are related to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. He says that if they have tried to transform their minds in accordance with God’s will, God will in due course transform their bodies as well and make them immortal.

This is what Paul says in Romans chapter 8 about that coming change. It can be seen most clearly in the form of a table, which is on the next page.

#### ❖ **The Redemption of our Bodies**

The end of the process as Paul describes it leads to bodily transformation. What starts in the mind ends in a totally changed nature, one which is forever free from sin and death. We will then no longer live “*in the flesh*” but “*in the spirit*”; our bodies will become spiritual bodies, like those of the Lord Jesus and the angels in heaven. At the beginning of our thinking about the meaning of the Spirit we noted that the word has a wide range of meaning and now we can see the advantage of that. The process of becoming immortal has to start in the mind and will eventually lead to bodily transformation. ‘*Life in the Spirit*’ thus has these two senses:

	<b>Verse</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
10	<i>“If Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, <b>the Spirit is life</b> because of righteousness.”</i>	In baptism we pledge to put to death our old way of life, because we want to end our life of sin, but we have hope of life because we have a new attitude of mind and heart.
11	<i>“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, <b>he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies</b> through his Spirit who dwells in you.”</i>	It is the same attitude that Jesus himself had (a spiritual one) and God, who raised Jesus from the dead, will raise us in due course, through that same power that has already begun to work in us and which lives in us.
13	<i>“For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, <b>you will live.</b>”</i>	That new attitude we possess – our new life from God – helps us to conquer the passions and feelings we have always had. We must put them to death every day if we want to live forever.
23	<i>“And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, <b>the redemption of our bodies.</b>”</i>	This process of salvation which is taking place inside us is going eventually to lead to our redemption. It’s a struggle now to overcome our lower nature and live Christ-like lives. However, if we genuinely try to do this as children of God, He will change us to be made like Christ at his return.

- 1 a different mindset, and
- 2 a different bodily state.

But it is one process, not two: unless we have begun to live differently now, we cannot expect to live differently in the age to come. Paul says something else as well. He says that all creation is eagerly waiting for the time when it will be set free from all those things which now limit and restrain it. At the time when God makes men and women free from sin and death, He is also due to change the way the world is constituted. Here’s the actual passage:

*“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:18-23).*

This is another of those passages where we need to jot down the various things we are told – try that exercise for yourself if you wish and then compare your list with this one. Paul says that:

- Now we suffer; but in the age to come things will be glorious. Scripture says that in that age *“all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD” (Numbers 14:21);*
- When those who are members of God’s family – the sons of God – are revealed to the world as the immortal occupants of the new age, the whole created order is to be renewed. This is in line with other Scriptures that talk about the outpouring of God’s Spirit power, which will then change both people and places (see Isaiah 32:15);
- God’s created order has been damaged by the effects of sin and is now in *“bondage to decay”* – everything is in the process of deterioration and is on a downward path. This is happening as a result of Adam’s sin when God cursed the ground, saying: *“Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field” (Genesis 3:17,18);*
- At present all human life is subject to *“futility”* – it is useless to try to achieve anything lasting or fulfilling apart from God. This is part of God’s plan, to direct our attention to Him and His gracious offer of salvation. He wants us to be set free from the present bondage of sin and death;

- Present troubles in the world and in our personal lives are the birthpangs of a new age. They indicate that God's gracious purpose is nearing its fulfilment, when those who are His children will *"obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God"*, which is a lovely and colourful way of saying that there are much better times ahead;
- Our present bodies are to be changed and when that happens – when we are made immortal – all the sorrow and sadness we now experience will be taken away. In the new age it is said of those who walk in God's way that *"they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away"* (Isaiah 35:9,10).

### ❖ Jesus the First-Begotten

The Lord Jesus was raised from the dead by the power of God's Spirit: he was *"declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead"* (Romans 1:4). That event began the Lord's new life with God, for whilst he had always lived in close communion with his Father, his mortality had separated them. Jesus was on earth but his Father was in heaven. Now, having become sinless and immortal, Jesus ascended to heaven to dwell at his Father's right hand. Father and Son continue to work together for our salvation, as they had done before, but now their work is of a different sort.

Jesus explained to his disciples while he was still with them that after his ascension he would still help them and be close to them, but his help would now be of a different kind entirely. As a resurrected and glorified Son the limitations of his earthly life would be removed.

What happened to the Lord shows us what will happen to his followers. The great hope of life after death offered in the Bible is that of bodily resurrection from the dead. Over the years people have got confused about this because pagan teaching about an 'immortal soul' – which is not a Bible term or idea – became mixed up in their thinking with true Bible teaching. If all people lived forever anyway, or if their new life began in heaven immediately after death, what would be the point of the resurrection of the dead? So resurrection lost its true importance and became a sort of awkward Bible teaching. To this day at funerals, you can hear ministers and priests saying that the 'dear departed' has gone to be with God in heaven and then they take a reading from the Bible which says the dead will be raised. This is even more confusing when such people say how bad the sinful body was and how much better it is to live without it in heaven, while the Bible reading says that the body will be raised. No wonder people get confused!

### ❖ Death – the End

The clear teaching of the Bible, as we have already seen, is that when we die, we cease to exist. When God said to Adam: *"By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return"* (Genesis 3:19). He was not promising him life in heaven after death, but the punishment of death in the dust of the ground. Death is a punishment not a reward: the end of life not a new beginning.

For some people that will be the complete end, they will never exist again. The Bible says that unbelievers will *"perish"*; they will sleep forever in the unconscious state of death; they will never exist again. It's a strange thing, but people who have come to believe they are immortal seem to miss the clear warnings from God that, unless they do something about it, they will cease to exist. For Scripture says:

*"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not **perish** but have eternal life"* (John 3:16);

*"For when he dies he will carry nothing away; his glory will not go down after him. For though, while he lives, he counts himself blessed, – and though you get praise when you do well for yourself – his soul will go to the generation of his fathers, who will **never again see light**. Man in his pomp yet without understanding is **like the beasts that perish**"* (Psalm 49:17-20);

*"One who wanders from the way of good sense will **rest in the assembly of the dead**"* (Proverbs 21:16);

*"**They are dead, they will not live; they are shades, they will not arise; to that end you have visited them with **destruction** and **wiped out all remembrance of them**"*** (Isaiah 26:14);

*"The gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to **destruction**, and those who enter by it are many"* (Matthew 7:13);

*"Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. **Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell**"* (Matthew 10:28).

## ❖ Waking from Sleep

There is only one thing that can save us from extinction or total destruction, once we are dead, and that is resurrection. The Bible never promises us a dwelling place in heaven; quite the contrary. We read of the faithful of old that they “*slept with their fathers*,” where *sleep* is an encouraging description, for we can be awakened from sleep. We are told that such faithful followers of God never obtained what He had promised them, but that they would enter into that inheritance when the faithful of all ages also received it. And we are told that they corrupted away in the grave.

Take King David as just one example of a faithful man who was pleasing to God, who was inspired to write many Psalms which talk about life and death. He is described as a man “*after God’s own heart*;” so if anyone was going to survive death and go to heaven, King David would be a most likely candidate. But this is what we are told by him and about him.

Ref	Writer	What was said?
Psalm 6:5	David	<i>“In death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who will give you praise?”</i>
Psalm 13:3	David	<i>“Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.”</i>
1 Kings 2:10	Inspired writer	<i>“Then David slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David.”</i>
Acts 2:29,34	Apostle Peter	<i>“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day ... For David did not ascend into the heavens.”</i>
Acts 13:22,36	Apostle Paul	<i>“He raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, ‘I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will’ ... David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption.”</i>
Hebrews 11:32, 39,40	Inspired writer	<i>“Time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets ... all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”</i>

This is the terminology used throughout Scripture – that of falling asleep in death and of being awakened from death by the resurrection of the dead. Here are just a few instances:

*“Many of those who **sleep** in the dust of the earth shall **awake**, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2);*

*“All were weeping and mourning for her, but (Jesus) said, ‘Do not weep, for she is not dead but **sleeping**.’ And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But taking her by the hand he called, saying, ‘Child, **arise**.’ And her spirit returned, and she got up at once” (Luke 8:52-55);*

*“Our friend Lazarus has **fallen asleep**, but I go to **awaken him**.’ The disciples said to him, ‘Lord, if he has fallen **asleep**, he will recover.’ Now Jesus had spoken of his **death**, but they thought that he meant taking rest in **sleep**. Then Jesus told them plainly, ‘Lazarus has **died**’” (John 11:11-14);*

*“And falling to his knees (Stephen) cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ And when he had said this, he **fell asleep**” (Acts 7:60);*

*“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (1 Corinthians 15:17,18).*

## ❖ The Great Awakening

When Jesus lived on earth he was able to awaken people from the sleep of death. Indeed, two of the passages listed above refer to miracles he performed when first he raised Jairus' daughter and then Lazarus. The very fact that Jesus raised these two people shows that he did not think they were better off dead, as they might well have been if it is true that at death we go immediately to heaven to be with God. He knew that death is a punishment and not a reward, and he was uniquely placed to be able to free people from the prison house of the grave. Jesus could do this because God his Father had given him that power. He explained that on one occasion in these words:

*“Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will’” (John 5:19-21);*

*“For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself ... Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgement” (5:26,28,29).*

Note how careful the Lord Jesus is to distinguish between himself and his Father and to attribute glory and power to Him. That is typical of the way Jesus spoke of his Father, always stressing his own inferiority and thus magnifying God. Here he attributes to God the power to give life, but says that Jesus:

- ✓ has been given that power by God, and
- ✓ will exercise that power when he summons from death those who are responsible to judgement – those who have either done “good” or “evil” in God’s sight.

## ❖ Coming Conqueror

For this to happen, of course, it is necessary for the Lord Jesus to be back in the earth and that is something the Bible promises all the way through – that a conqueror would one day come to destroy the power of sin and death and thus set people free. Here is an example of that Bible-long theme, from the prophet Isaiah:

*“On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up ... death forever; and the LORD God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, ‘Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation’” (Isaiah 25:6-9);*

*“In the path of your judgements, O LORD, we wait for you; your name and remembrance are the desire of our soul” (26:8);*

*“Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead” (26:19).*

These verses give us a glimpse of what resurrection will be like. The apostle Paul gives a detailed explanation in another of his letters which we need to look at in the next chapter.

## Things to Read

- 📖 Chapter 8 is probably the most difficult one in Romans, especially because it says such a lot about the Spirit of God in action. Now we have looked at that subject in some detail you may want to read the chapter again slowly and carefully. The more information there is in a passage of Scripture, the more benefit we get by looking carefully and prayerfully at what it is teaching.
- 📖 Ephesians chapter 4 tells us a lot about God’s Spirit. It starts off by explaining the way in which Spirit gifts were given in the first century and then tells us what we must do now, by renewing our minds and learning to live like Jesus. We need to learn what is true and then live according to that understanding.

## Questions to Answer

- 17.1 John chapter 11 tells us about the resurrection of Lazarus. First Jesus explains what he believes about death and then what he can do about it. Look at the passage and summarize what you learn about death and resurrection. (John 11 verses 1-14; 21-26; 43-44)
- 17.2 What did God tell Adam would happen to him if he sinned? How was that happening going to be overcome as explained in the first promise God ever made to mankind? (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:14-21; 1 Corinthians 15:21-26)