

William Tyndale

On the Immortality of the Soul

William Tyndale (1490-1536) was an English scholar, the first to translate the Bible from the original languages into English, helping bring the Protestant Reformation to England. Sir Thomas More was Tyndale's primary antagonist, challenging his translation of the Bible which called into question many Roman Catholic doctrines and practices. Tyndale was forced to defend his translation, and to point out those false doctrines of Rome. Among them, Tyndale argued against the Catholic teaching on heaven, hell, purgatory, and prayers to the saints, all of which were based on the pagan concept of the "immortality of the soul."¹ Tyndale's Bibles were collected and burned, and Tyndale himself was betrayed and burned at the stake at the instigation of the Roman Catholic Church. The following quotes are excerpts from Tyndale's written response to Sir Thomas More's defense of those Catholic doctrines.

"And when he [Sir Thomas More] proveth that the saints be in heaven in glory with Christ already, saying, 'If God be there God, they be in heaven, for he is not the God of the dead;' there he stealeth away Christ's argument, wherewith he proveth the resurrection: that Abraham and all saints should rise again, and not that their souls were in heaven; which doctrine was not yet in the world. And with that doctrine he taketh away the resurrection quite, and maketh Christ's argument of none effect. For when Christ allegeth the scripture, that God is Abraham's God, and addeth to, that God is not God of the dead but of the living,² and so proveth that Abraham must rise again; I deny Christ's argument, [if] I say with M. More, that Abraham is yet alive, not because of the resurrection, but because his soul is in heaven. And in like manner, Paul's argument unto the Corinthians is naught worth: for when he saith, 'if there be no resurrection, we be of all wretches the miserablest; here we have no pleasure, but sorrow, care, and oppression; and therefore, if we rise not again, all our suffering is vain:'³ 'Nay, Paul, thou art unlearned; go to Master Moore, and learn a new way. We be not most miserable, though we rise not again; for our souls go to heaven as soon as we be dead, and are there in as great joy as Christ that is risen again.' And I marvel that Paul had not comforted the Thessalonians with that doctrine,⁴ if he had wist it, that souls of their dead had been

¹ Quotes are from: Tyndale, William, *An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*, 1536 (Reprint for The Parker Society, Cambridge: The University Press, 1850).

<https://books.google.com/books?id=EMcOAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA2&dq=&hl=en#v=onepage&q&f=false>

² Matt. 22:31-33

³ 1 Cor. 15:16-19

⁴ 1 Thess. 4:13-18

in joy; as he did with the resurrection, that their dead should rise again. If the souls be in heaven, in as great glory as the angels, after your doctrine, shew me what cause should be of the resurrection?"⁵

"And ye, in putting them [the departed ghosts] in heaven, hell, and purgatory, destroy the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul prove the resurrection. What God doth with them, that shall we know when we come to them. The true faith putteth the resurrection, which we be warned to look for every hour. The heathen philosophers, denying that, did put that the souls did ever live. And the pope joineth the spiritual doctrine of Christ and the fleshly doctrine of philosophers together; things so contrary that they cannot agree, no more than the Spirit and the flesh do in a Christian man. And because the fleshly-minded pope consenteth unto heathen doctrine, therefore he corrupteth the Scripture to stablish it. Moses saith in Deut. 'The secret things pertain unto the Lord, and the things that be opened pertain to us, that we do all that is written in the book.'⁶Wherefore, sir, if we loved the laws of God, and would occupy ourselves to fulfil them, and would on the other side be meek, and let God alone with his secrets, and suffer him to be wiser than we, we should make none article of faith of this or that. And again, if the souls be in heaven, tell me why they be not in as good case as the angels be? And then what cause is there of the resurrection?"⁷

⁵ p. 118

⁶ Deut. 29:29

⁷ pp. 180-181