

## Eternal Conscious Torment vs Annihilation 008

Ecclesiastes 9:5

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Let us take our Bibles this morning and open them to Ecclesiastes 9:5.

First of all, what is Annihilationism? It is two things coming together simultaneously: conditional immortality (I am hoping we can get specifically into critiquing that part of it today) and Annihilationism. Basically, what they are teaching through this is that the human soul was not created to be eternal: people are not inherently eternal; people are not inherently designed to live forever.

According to conditional immortality, people do not become immortal until they get saved. What happens to all these unsaved people? Well, that leads to the second word that they teach—that leads to Annihilationism, which says that you spend a certain amount of time in hell, and then you cease to exist. You go out of existence.

This is a view, a minority view, that has been floating around for a long time. Late last year, Kirk Cameron, of all people, brought it back to life by giving an endorsement of it. Here is a newspaper article that says, "Kirk Cameron Denies 'Eternal Conscious Torment,' Is Now An Annihilationist?"<sup>1</sup>

All of a sudden everybody started taking this view that had been—I thought—confined to the dustbin of history. In this world of social media that we are living in, if an actor—particularly someone that everybody likes in Christianity, someone that is a Christian in the film industry—endorses something, then all of a sudden it becomes popular.

That is why we are doing this critique. We moved into Point Number Two, where I gave you the strongest Biblical passages against Annihilationism. These passages, I think, clearly teach that unsaved people will exist forever in a state of eternal conscious torment.

Then from there, we moved into Point Number Three, which are not specific Biblical passages dealing with this subject but broader theological arguments. Here are the four broader theological arguments against conditional immortality Annihilationism, where the Bible, in fact, teaches eternal conscious torment for the sinner, or the unsaved.

Then from there, we moved to Point Number Four, because these people could not have any sea legs whatsoever—this view could not have any traction whatsoever—unless they had verses that they were able to use.

Sure enough, the Annihilationists have their verses, and we have been answering those verses: second death (Revelation 20:14); destroy (2 Thessalonians 1:9); destruction (Revelation 11:18); burning up (Matthew 3:12); eternal smoke, not fire (Revelation 14:11); perdition (2 Peter 3:7); it would be better for them if they had never been born

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<sup>1</sup> <https://protestia.com/2025/12/06/kirk-cameron-denies-eternal-conscious-torment-is-now-an-annihilationist>

(Mark 14:21); the wicked perishing (2 Peter 3:9); being blotted out of existence (Hebrews 9:25-26). I tried to show you that the Annihilationists are mishandling all of these verses. These verses do not teach what Annihilationists believe that they teach.

We left it off last time with Point J, where the Annihilationists are going into what we call the wisdom literature. What is the wisdom literature? Well, it is five books after you get outside the historical books. It would be Job, Psalms—Solomon wrote three of those books—Song of Solomon, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes.

These are books that are not really historical books. They are not prophets. But they are sandwiched, in our Protestant organization of the Old Testament, right there in the middle. You have seventeen historical books, seventeen writing prophets—and sandwiched in the middle are these five books that we call wisdom literature.

The wisdom books have a tendency to be trans-dispensational, meaning they apply to God's people across the board, whether you are living in the Church Age or in ancient Israel. They are unique in that sense, but they are just principles dealing with wisdom for life—to give you an over-simplified summary of them.

But what you will find with Annihilationists is that they are going into these wisdom books, and they are grabbing verses to support their doctrine of Annihilationism. I showed you how they used Ecclesiastes 9:10 last time, which says (Solomon writing),

*"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going"*  
(Ecclesiastes 9:10).

An Annihilationist would grab that and say, "Well, there it is—right there in the Bible. This is talking about people going into Sheol (hell) in the afterlife and ceasing to exist because after all, there is no activity or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol." When in reality, I tried to show you last time that this is talking about bodily and earthly activity in context.

There will not be any buying a house and refurnishing your living room and getting a new paint job on your car, when you go into the afterlife—you are not going to be able to do that. That is literally what it is saying. It is not talking about a cessation of existence.

With that being said, let us pick it up with Ecclesiastes 9:5, which is what I had you open up to. This is just an example of how the Annihilationists are using wisdom literature to teach Annihilationism.

It says in Ecclesiastes 9:5,

*"For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten"*  
(Ecclesiastes 9:5).

When it says that the dead do not know anything, and their memory is forgotten, an Annihilationist grabs that and says, "Well, there it is in the Bible: when you die as an unsaved person, because you were never designed to live forever in the first place, you're annihilated—you just cease to exist."

But of course, when you look at things like this, you always want to look at it in context, right? Right after Ecclesiastes 9:5 comes Ecclesiastes 9:6.

Ecclesiastes 9:6 says,

*"Indeed their love, their hate and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun"  
(Ecclesiastes 9:6).*

What this is dealing with is human philosophy. Solomon wrote this in a state of rebellion—most of it—although at the end of the book it seems that he repents.

The last part of Solomon's life really did not end well for him. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines, and he got all those accessories because he entered into treaties with foreign countries, because that was part of the deal: when you enter into a treaty with a foreign nation, you get the princess as part of the package.

He obviously entered into a lot of treaties, because he had 700 wives and 300 concubines. The treaties are a problem, because Deuteronomy 17 says that the king is not to amass wealth for himself, and he is not to enter into treaties with foreign countries. Solomon did all of that as the third king of the United Kingdom.

Then Solomon's many wives, the Bible says, led him astray—led him away from the Lord. That is the spirit or the mentality in which Solomon writes a lot of these words in Ecclesiastes. He is talking about his regrets for following wisdom under the sun.

"Under the sun" means humanistic wisdom, independent of the divine viewpoint. So, what Solomon is doing here in Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 is not making some statement about the afterlife. What he's saying is that human philosophy looks pretty empty, when under the sun.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum describes what Solomon is doing here in Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 as follows:

"Ecclesiastes 9:5 does speak about 'the dead' not knowing 'any thing,' but the context of Ecclesiastes 9:5 is simply drawing the conclusion of human philosophy. Indeed, from the standpoint of human philosophy, 'under the sun,' that is the way it looks (v. 6). But again, Ecclesiastes 9:5 simply spells out what human philosophy feels 'under the sun.' It is not a divine decree; it is not a positive affirmation of the Word of God."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Fruchtenbaum, A. *Footsteps of the Messiah*, 713-14.

What Fruchtenbaum is saying is that these people who are trying to develop annihilation from a text like that are not really understanding what Solomon is writing about here. He is not trying to develop didactic theological points about the afterlife. He is just explaining the folly of human wisdom and how he misspent a large chunk of the end of his life.

It is always troubling when people want to go to wisdom literature and develop some ironclad doctrine from it. If you are finding something in wisdom literature that you want to develop doctrine from, then you need to see it also clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture. And the subject of Annihilationism, as I showed you in Point Number Two, clearly does not teach this doctrine of annihilation.

Let me just give you one other example before we shift gears here: of how they use wisdom literature to teach annihilation. Look at Psalm 146:4.

When you are looking at wisdom literature, we think that Job is the author of the Book of Job. David wrote most of the Psalms: many of them while he was on the run, some of them when he was in an unrepentant state, some of them after he had repented. You have to examine each Psalm carefully to figure out how much didactic, universal truth you are going to draw out of it.

Then, of course, Solomon wrote Song of Solomon in his young marital years. He wrote the book of Proverbs mid-life, and then at the end of his life, after having mid-life crisis, he wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes.

David makes this point in Psalm 146:4:

*"His spirit departs, he returns to the earth; In that very day his thoughts perish" (Psalm 146:4).*

The Annihilationists come to that verse and they say, "Well, there it is in the Bible: a man's thoughts perish when he dies. Therefore, the unsaved just cease to exist." But if you look at Psalm 146:3-4 together, you get the idea of what David is dealing with in Psalm 146.

Psalm 146:3-4 says,

*"Do not trust in princes, In mortal man, in whom there is no salvation. His spirit departs, he returns to the earth; In that very day his thoughts perish" (Psalm 146:3-4).*

This is dealing with how a man's devices, plans, and thoughts cannot be carried on here in the earth at physical death. Why would I spend my time following a human philosophy when everything that that human philosopher is building, creating, and planning—at some point in this life, when he dies, he will not be able to carry on those plans anymore?

That is all it is saying. It is not saying that the person in the next life does not exist anymore. That would be a reading of it that would be very strange—not in harmony with what wisdom literature is trying to introduce.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum, of Psalm 146:3-4 (the Annihilationists' misuse of it), says,

"Another Old Testament passage that they use is Psalm 146:4, where it states that a man's 'thoughts perish' when he dies. But actually, verses 3 and 4 taken together and in context..."<sup>3</sup>

See, that is what I am trying to do with all of these passages. I am just trying to help us put it in context, because context is king. The three rules of real estate are location, location, location. The three rules of Bible study are context, context, context.

Fruchtenbaum goes on and he says:

"...But actually, verses 3 and 4 taken together and in context simply teach that a man's devices, man's plans, and man's thoughts cannot be carried out on the earth after physical death. He has lost any opportunity to see his plans carried out; it does not teach a cessation of existence."<sup>4</sup>

All David is saying is, "Why in the world are you going to put your trust into the great leaders of this world, when the reality is that everything that they are producing reaches a point where it cannot continue on, because they are going to die at some point? Isn't it better to get wisdom from God because He has always existed and will always exist?"

"The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord abideth forever" (paraphrase, Isaiah 40:8; 1 Peter 1:24-25). What you are seeing with the Annihilationists is that they are grabbing these obscure statements from the wisdom literature, trying to teach simple truths, and they are trying to develop this doctrine of Annihilationism from it. I do not think you can do that.

We have looked at the introduction to the controversy. We have looked at the Biblical arguments against Annihilationism. We have looked at the theological arguments against Annihilationism. I have done my best to answer the major Annihilationist Biblical texts that are used, and what I would like to move into now are the theological arguments that the Annihilationists are using. These are the broader, more theological concepts that Annihilationism and conditional immortality people typically use. There are eight of those.

The first one: let us start over in 1 Timothy 6:16. The first argument is that immortality—and this is big here—is a gift only for the believer. God only gave immortality to the believer at the point of faith alone in Christ alone. Everyone else was never given the gift of immortality. Everyone else was never designed to live forever.

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<sup>3</sup> Fruchtenbaum, A. *Footsteps of the Messiah*, 713

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Therefore, according to Annihilationism, the unsaved will go into hell for a season, but they will cease to exist. They will go out of existence. The reason they go out of existence is that they were never given the gift of immortality, because the gift of immortality was only designed for the saved.

One of the very popular passages that Annihilationists use is 1 Timothy 6:16, where it says this of God:

*"who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen" (1 Timothy 6:16).*

When it says in 1 Timothy 6:16 that God alone possesses immortality, the conditional immortality person—the Annihilationist—comes and says, "There it is, right there in the Bible. People were never designed to live forever, only God possesses that."

"Well, what about everybody else?"

"Well, if you are saved, you get the gift of immortality. But if you are unsaved, you do not get the gift of immortality, and you will go into hell. At some point, you are annihilated."

They make a big deal about this immortality—only God has it. Part of their argument is that immortality is never used of unbelievers; it is only used of believers. Only believers receive the gift of immortality at the point of faith alone in Christ alone.

Let me give you a few of the passages they use for that. Notice 1 Corinthians 15:53-54. (This is the famous resurrection chapter. It is actually describing the Rapture, which is our resurrection.) It says,

*"For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:53).*

It says in 1 Corinthians 15:54:

*"But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, 'DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory'" (1 Corinthians 15:54).*

1 Corinthians 15:55:

*"O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" (1 Corinthians 15:55).*

So, they will use a verse like that and they will say, "There it is in the Bible: God alone possesses immortality, and He gives it as a gift to the saved only. Only the saved will exist forever. Unsaved people will not because they were never given the gift of immortality."

If you go over to Romans 2:7, you will see another verse that they use. It says,

*"to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life;" (Romans 2:7).*

They say, "There it is in the Bible. Immortality only belongs to the saved." This is why their view is called conditional immortality. It is a combination with Annihilationism, but you cannot have someone annihilated unless you believe in conditional immortality—that immortality, never dying, never ceasing to exist, is only given to the saved.

That is the argument. What would be the response? Well, here it comes. (This is the first of their broader theological arguments that they like to use.).

Immortality is something more than mere eternal existence. Immortality refers to the quality of existence, not the duration of existence. Immortality is a wonderful thing, but it is not dealing with the duration of one's existence. It is dealing with the quality of one's existence.

Saved people will last forever; unsaved people will last forever. But only the saved people have immortality, or a quality of life, which transcends and is above and beyond that which the unsaved experience. It is dealing with two qualities of existence and not the fact that one exists forever and the other does not. It is not dealing with duration. That is where they are confused. It is dealing with quality of existence.

Immortality is a gift given to the saved—let me rephrase that: immortality is given to saved humans in bodily form and comes at the resurrection. That is what immortality is. You are placed in a resurrected body which can never die. It is a special gift that is given to saved people, but it is not dealing with, "Well, now you are going to exist forever, whereas before you couldn't."

What it is dealing with is that you are always going to exist forever, but here is a quality of life that you can now experience that unsaved people—who also will exist forever—will not enjoy. Let me try to prove this to you.

Notice Luke 20:35-36. Are angels ever called immortal? Is the word "immortal" or "immortality" ever assigned to angels? It is not, yet angels will exist forever.

Notice Luke 20:35-36. Jesus makes a tremendous statement here concerning the doctrine of angels or angelology. He says,

*"but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; for they cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection" (Luke 20:35-36).*

Angels are never called immortal, but clearly there in Luke 20:35-36, they will never die. Therefore, the subject of immortality must relate to something other than "You are going to live forever." It must be talking about the quality of life, not the duration of life.

Angels that never die are never called immortal, but they never cease to exist. It is the same with unsaved people. Yes, maybe they are not immortal the way the Bible defines

it, but do not take that as a statement of, "They cease to exist," or else we would have to argue that angels, who are not called immortal either, would have to cease to exist.

This whole subject of immortality—it must be dealing with the subject of the quality of one's afterlife.

Norman Geisler summarizes this whole thing as follows. He says,

"...the annihilationist fails to acknowledge that 'immortality' and 'existing forever' are not the same. As noted, angels will live forever but are never called immortal..."<sup>5</sup>

Luke 20:35-36.

"...The term 'immortality,' like 'eternal life,' has a positive quality that mere 'existence' does not."<sup>6</sup>

If you are going to tell me that unsaved people live forever and saved people live forever, and that the saved people living forever will enjoy a quality of existence that unsaved people will not have, you are completely orthodox and correct and Biblical in your belief.

If you twist that around to make it sound like only the saved people live forever and the unsaved people go out of existence, you are suddenly twisting the Bible—because that is not what 'immortality' even means.

If that is what 'immortality' meant, then the angels,—and demons, for that matter; who are fallen angels—who are not never called immortal, would cease to exist as well. It is almost as if this camp does not want you to see Luke 20:35-36. "Nothing to see here, folks. Move right along."

"Jesus defined 'eternal life' as knowing God (John 17:3),..."<sup>7</sup>

That is quality of life, not duration of life.

"...and though unbelievers do not have this, by virtue of His image they will still exist forever..."<sup>8</sup>

Both unsaved and saved people bear God's image—they have to exist forever. For them to go out of existence would be an attack on God, because they are made in the very image of God. This is what makes people different from the animal kingdom. Because we are all image bearers of God, we all have to exist forever.

Now, some of the image bearers will enjoy a much higher quality of life than others, based on whether they trusted in Christ as their Savior. (If they trusted in Christ as their

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<sup>5</sup> Geisler, N. L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 401-02

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Savior, then they know God, which is eternal life (John 17:3). Then they are given immortality at the resurrection.)

Unsaved people, by contrast, do not have eternal life—do not have immortality. But that is a statement of the quality of their existence, not the duration of their existence. All of these ideas get convoluted and twisted in this Annihilationist teaching. Though unbelievers do not have this "immortality," by virtue of His image, they will still exist forever.

Geisler continues and says,

"...Also, even though the term immortal is biblically used only of God..."<sup>9</sup>

1 Timothy 6:16.

"...and His gift to believers, nevertheless, terms like everlasting (Matt. 25:41 nkjv) and eternal (Mark 3:29) are used of unbelievers."<sup>10</sup>

"Hey, immortality is only for the saved. Hey, only God is called immortal," says the Annihilationist. Well, that is true, but that is dealing with quality of life, used to describe the type of life that unsaved people will experience—a much lower quality of life. We have other terms used in the Scripture like "everlasting" and "eternal."

That distinction relates to quality of life in the afterlife, not duration of life. What the Annihilationist wants to turn this into is a discussion about who lives forever and who does not. That is not what the Bible is dealing with. What it is dealing with is who enjoys the highest quality of life and who does not, although both groups exist forever.

That is the first major theological argument that they use. The first major theological argument that they use is that immortality is a gift only for the saved. While that might be true, that is a statement of quality, not duration. That is the key point to know about this.

The second major theological argument that these folks use—these Annihilationists, merging together Annihilationism with conditional immortality—is the temporal nature of the soul.

What they are trying to say is that when God designed the human soul (that is the part of us that is designed to live forever according to our view), God never created it to live forever. It only would live forever in a saved person, because they are given the gift of immortality at the point of faith alone in Christ alone, but everyone else just stops existing at some point because the soul was never created to live forever.

Let us go to Genesis 2:7, and I will show you how to reason. Genesis 2:7 is about the creation of man. It says,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

*"Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7).*

"A living being," "breath of life." "Living being" is a translation from the Hebrew word "nepes" (נֶפֶשׁ) which basically means "to be alive." What the conditional immortality and annihilation view does with that (that Hebrew word "nepes" [נֶפֶשׁ]) is they say, "Well, that is the same word given to animals, and they are not going to live forever."

They will notice the same use of "nepes" (נֶפֶשׁ) in Genesis 1:21, one chapter earlier. Genesis 1:21 says,

*"God created the great sea monsters..." (Genesis 1:21).*

Man and woman do not even exist yet in this order. We are not on Day Six yet. We are still on Day Five.

*"God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind; and God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:21).*

When it says that God created the sea monsters and every living creature, you should underline "every living creature," because that is the Hebrew word "nepes" (נֶפֶשׁ), used of an animal.

Look at Genesis 1:24. (This is the sixth day. This is before man, woman—humanity—come into existence.).

*"Then God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind'; and it was so" (Genesis 1:24).*

When you see that word "living creatures" in Genesis 1:24, you should underline it because that is the Hebrew word "nepes" (נֶפֶשׁ).

Here is the way the Annihilationist argues: "When God created man, the word that is used of him is 'nepes' (נֶפֶשׁ); he became alive (Genesis 2:7). That is the exact same Hebrew word used of animals. Animals are not going to live forever, are they?" That is what they say. "Therefore, man was never designed to live forever."

Let me show you how they do this in the New Testament concerning the word "psyche" (ψυχή), from which we get the word "psychology"? Have you ever heard of the study of psychology? Do you know what psychology is? It is the study of the soul, the inward person of a person.

We have the best psychology book in the world, by the way, because we have got the answer to the "psyche" (ψυχή) or the soul. Notice what Jesus said about humanity in Matthew 16:26. As Matthew records the words of Christ, the word "psyche" is used to describe people. Jesus is giving the principles of discipleship:

*"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?..." (Matthew 16:26).*

You should underline the word "soul." That is the word "psyche."

*"...Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26).*

You should underline "soul." That is a repetition of the noun "psyche" (ψυχή).

So, what an Annihilationist says is, "You know what? That same word is used of animals—just like 'nepes' (נֶפֶשׁ). Animals are not going to live forever. Why would we think people would live forever?"

Let me show you how this is used of animals. It is used of animals in the second bowl judgment in the Book of Revelation. Notice Revelation 16:3, about the second bowl judgment. (This is the sea becoming blood, and everything in the sea dying.) It says,

*"The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died" (Revelation 16:3).*

When you see that expression "every living thing" or "living thing," underline the words "living thing." That is a translation of the word "psyche" (ψυχή) which is the exact same word used of sea animals and used to describe the souls of human beings.

An Annihilationist, or a conditional immortality person, makes a big deal about this. They say, "You know, animals do not live forever. Their living status, whether it is 'nepes' (נֶפֶשׁ) or 'psyche' (ψυχή), is described the exact same way as human beings. Human beings were never designed by God to live forever." That is the argument that is being used.

Part of their argument comes from Genesis 3:22. This has to do with Adam and Eve being kicked out of Eden. There is this statement that is made in Genesis 3:22 after Adam and Eve fell and the Lord kicked them out of Eden. There were cherubim stationed, preventing their re-entrance into Eden. Why did God do that?

It says in Genesis 3:22,

*"Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us,..." (Genesis 3:22).*

That is a very early reference to the triunity of God. We do not know He is triune yet, but we know that within the Godhead there is a plurality because of that statement.

*"Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'—" (Genesis 3:22).*

What an Annihilationist does with that passage is they will say, "You see it right there: God never intended people to live forever. That is why the Tree of Life was in Eden,

because they had to keep eating from it to stay alive, because they were never designed to live forever."

This is the kind of thing that you run into from Kirk Cameron, Doug Batchelor, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. These are the kind of arguments that they use.

So, how would I respond to some of these arguments? Well, let us start with the "nepes" (נֶפֶשׁ) and "psyche" (ψυχή) argument. What does it mean? "Psyche" (ψυχή) means soul." "Nepes" (נֶפֶשׁ) means "living being." It just means "life." That is all it means. Life is shared by humans and animals.

My cats—you can watch them every day when they are not sleeping. They are alive. They are looking around. They are chasing lizards. I never knew our house had so many lizards till I got these two cats. They kill these lizards. The lizards come in through the window, I guess, and the cats kill them. Then they look up at me—how proud they are of what they have accomplished.

They want to be fed—they make noise when they want something. They can get scared or startled. You should see when the lawn is mowed: they get this frightened look in their eyes. So, they are very much alive. They have a "nepes" (נֶפֶשׁ). Do animals have souls? In that sense, yes.

"Psyche" (ψυχή) means "living being." That is what animals have. Animals share that status of being alive with humans. But animals and humans, though both alive, do not have the same kind of life. My life as an image bearer of God is different from theirs. "Nepes" (נֶפֶשׁ), or "psyche" (ψυχή), does not mean "eternal."

Humans, by contrast, have a life that is distinct because it was designed by God from inception point to exist forever, because I have something that my cats do not have. Now, we share "psyche" (ψυχή) and "nepes" (נֶפֶשׁ) in the sense that we are both alive, but I am different from them because, unlike them, I am made in God's image. Did you know that?

That is what makes human beings different. They are different from the animals because they are image bearers of God. That is a teaching that goes all the way back to Genesis 1:26.

*"Then God said, 'Let us make man...' (Genesis 1:26).*

Not the animals. Animals have "nepes" (נֶפֶשׁ) and "psyche," (ψυχή) but they do not have this.

*"...'Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them...'" (Genesis 1:26).*

This is why we have authority over the animals. We are created higher than them, even though both of us are alive.

*"...let them..." (Genesis 1:26).*

That is us, image bearers.

*"...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.' God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:26-27).*

Well, look at that. The woman has the exact same value as the man. Men and women are ontological equals. Now, in terms of function, or role, they play different roles. But even though God calls the man to be the head of the marriage and the woman to be in submission to her husband, the moment she does that is not making her less valuable than the man, any more than the Son Jesus submitting to the Father makes Him less God.

Jesus, over and over again in His incarnation, said, "Not My will be done, but Thy will be done" (paraphrase, Matthew 26:42; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; John 6:38). He took His will and submitted it to the will of the Father. But when He took His will and submitted it to the will of the Father, He did not relinquish one iota, or one millimeter, of deity.

They share the same essence, the Father and the Son, but They play different roles in the outworking of God's purposes. That is how to understand the relationship between men and women. They have the exact same value. They are both image bearers of God. If both are saved, 1 Peter 3:6-7 calls them joint heirs of salvation.

My wife and I play different roles within our marriage, but she is going to the exact same heaven I am going to. She is just as much an image bearer as am I. Once you start understanding this, then you start understanding that Christianity does not teach the devaluation of women, although God calls men and women to fulfill different roles.

*"God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing..." (Genesis 1:27-28).*

What is the word for "living thing"? "Nepes" (נֶפֶשׁ). Well, who do you think you are ruling over the fish? They are "nepes" (נֶפֶשׁ) just like you are. What gives you the authority to catch them and put them in a net and all of that? What gives you the authority of ruling over everything that moves on the earth and the birds of the sky? They are "nepes" (נֶפֶשׁ); I am "nepes" (נֶפֶשׁ).

Well, here is the difference: I am an image bearer; they are not. This argument that you are "nepes" (נֶפֶשׁ) and they are "nepes" (נֶפֶשׁ); you are "psyche" (ψυχή) and they are "psyche" (ψυχή); and they are not designed to live forever, so why would you think that you would be designed to live forever—

That is an argument that is just silly and does not even pay attention to what the text is saying. Yes, there are some points of similarity between us and animals, but similarity does not equal equality. That is a really important thing to understand.

Similarity does not equal equality. Just the fact that two things are similar does not make them equal. I have two cars in my garage. They look a lot alike. They both have steering wheels and steering columns and gas tanks and four tires and the engine is in front. But I will tell you one thing: those two cars are not the same. Even though they are similar, they are not equal. A bush and a tree are similar, but a bush does not equal a tree.

Yes, we have a point of similarity with animals. I do not know if I would call myself an animal activist—maybe I should be—but I am not in favor of mistreating the animals and abusing the animals. But I will tell you one thing: you want to treat an animal on equal par as a human? (Like back in the days of the spotted owl controversy: they wanted to shut down a whole industry to save the spotted owl and throw people out of their jobs.) I cannot be on board with that, because human life is more important than animal life. Because with human life, you are dealing with image bearers. With animal life, you are just dealing with "nepes" (נֶפֶשׁ).

In fact, Jesus talked about things like this. He said, "God takes care of the birds. Will He not take care of you, although you are more valuable than they?" (paraphrase, Matthew 6:26). In Matthew 12, Jesus criticizes the Pharisees. He healed on the Sabbath, and He said to the Pharisees, "Well, you pull your animal out of the ditch on a Sabbath. I have healed a person—you are bent out of shape about that? Don't you understand that a person is more valuable than an animal that you pulled out of a ditch?"

So, yes, there are similarities between us and the animals, but there is a world of difference. The difference is that we are made in the image of God.

"Yeah, but, Pastor, didn't the Fall of man take that image-bearing status away?"

Answer: "No."

This is long after the Fall of man. This is after the Flood, even. As humanity came out of the ark and was repopulated from Noah, his three sons and their wives, God gave the world the new covenant. He said this in Genesis 9:6 (this is the whole institution of capital punishment; the beginning of government):

*"Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God..." (Genesis 9:6).*

Well, wait a minute. The Fall already happened. Why would God call them image bearers of God if the Fall already happened? Because the Fall of man in Genesis 3 may have effaced our image bearing status, but it never erased it. We continue with our image bearing status even in the post-Fall world.

This is how you look at people. People can really get on your nerves. People can be an annoyance. People can be a nuisance. We can look at people as the enemy. You look

at the God-haters of this world and all the trouble they cause, and it is very easy to dehumanize them and make them less than what they are. But as far as God is concerned, they are image bearers of God.

The homosexual lobby and all these protesters—Christ's blood was shed for them too, because they bear God's image. People are not valuable because of their quality of life. See, the culture says people have value if they are rich and they are famous and they have job skills.

What about the guy under the bridge that you can smell the alcohol on his breath from twenty feet away? What about that guy that has not had a shower in who knows how many weeks or months? What do you do with that guy? Well, he is an image bearer of God, too. Jesus died for him, too.

We value people today on the basis of quality of life. The Bible says, "Do not do that. Value people on the basis of the sanctity of life," which means all people have value—if they are pretty or not, if they stink or not, if they have nice clothes on or not, if they live in a nice house or live under a bridge.

This is why Christians have always been in the forefront of hospitals and things of that nature. It is not the atheists that build those hospitals. One of our big hospitals in this area is called Methodist, right? I do not know of Atheist Central Hospital. Do you know of one?

Why are we Christians always on the cutting edge of hospitals and rehabilitation and things like that? Because we hold to the sanctity of life. The evolutionist is teaching the opposite: that humans are just naked apes.

You will notice that this image-bearing status continues. Does it continue even today? Well, go to James 3:9. Look at James 3:9. Now we are post-Fall, post-Flood, post-Tower-of-Babel, post-Cross, post-beginning-of-the-Church-Age. James tells us that we ought to control what we say. Whoops. That one hurts.

We ought to be able to control that two-by-two slab of mucous membrane between the gums that is called the tongue. We should not be going around slandering people and verbally abusing people. Obviously, James did not know what social media was, where people just go and they abuse and slander people out of anger constantly.

James says we ought not to be that way:

*"With it..." (James 3:9).*

"It" is the tongue.

*"...we bless our Lord and Father, and with it..." (James 3:9).*

James is talking about our hypocrisy, because we can praise the Lord with this tongue, and then curse image bearers with the same tongue.

*"With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God;" (James 3:9).*

Therefore, the image bearing status of people was never erased with the Fall. It was effaced, but not erased. This is why human beings cannot go out of existence: because they are made in God's image, and for them to go out of existence would be for God to deny Himself.

If God is forever, and we are made in His image, then humans, whether they are saved or not, are designed to live forever from the start. They do not suddenly develop this immortal state or this forever-enduring state at the point of faith. That is what the Annihilationist is trying to teach you. That is not what the Bible says.

Every single human being on Planet Earth today will be alive somewhere a hundred years from now—a thousand years from now—a million years from now—a billion years from now—a trillion years from now—a zillion years from now.

Well, why is that? Because that is how they were made from the beginning. Now, the quality of life is to be determined; but the existence, the duration, of life is not to be determined, because the soul, when created by God as part of not just our "nepes" (נַפְשׁוֹ) and "psyche" (ψυχή) status but of our image-bearing status, was designed by God to live forever.

This is why Jesus said things like, "What can a man give in exchange for his soul?" (paraphrase, Matthew 16:26; Mark 8:36-37; Luke 9:25). "Do you not understand? You are going to live forever. Think carefully about this offer of salvation." That is what Jesus is saying. This is true of pre-Fall—I am showing you from the Bible—and it is true of post-Fall.

Now, what about Genesis 3:22? According to Annihilationists, Adam and Eve had to keep eating from the tree to live forever: that is why God kicked them out of Eden. Well, again, put that in context. That is in the statement that takes place after the Fall of man: death is pronounced. Man already has a fallen nature. God did not want them to go back into Eden and eat from the tree of life, because they would have lived forever in their fallen state.

When I say "live forever," I am talking about living on this earth forever, because we know that they will live forever in the afterlife. Could you imagine Adolf Hitler living forever? No, it was a great thing when he died, if you are asking my opinion about it.

When the Khomeini thing happened, I thought it was a good thing that that guy died because that guy was killing 30,000 of his own people. So, he stopped his life on this earth, although he went off into the afterlife. I have a tendency to think that he is not experiencing a great quality of life in the afterlife.

But had God not put this barrier with the cherubim, Khomeini, Hitler, Castro—whoever—could have gone right back into Eden and lived forever in that state. Think of all the mayhem you could cause like that.

Genesis 3:22 refers to physical death only. We know that physical death is in view here because it says in Genesis 3:19,

*"By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19).*

That was the curse: you are going right back into the dirt from which you came. That is a statement about the physical body only. If there had not been a barrier in Eden, they could have lived forever in their fallen state and been exempted from death. That is all that is saying. It is not a statement that people's souls were never designed to exist forever.

In fact, when you go to Genesis 5, you see a long genealogy there. What do all of those people have in common, other than Enoch? Every single one of them died—it keeps saying, "and he died," "and he died," "and he died," "and he died," "and he died." Had God not put a barrier preventing Adam and Eve from reentering and eating from the tree of life, they would have lived forever bodily in their fallen state. Genesis 3:22 is not a statement that the soul was never designed to exist forever after death.