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## IS THERE EVIDENCE FOR LIFE AFTER DEATH?<sup>1</sup>

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“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28 NIV).

Atheists believe that death is the cessation of being. In their view, humans are merely bodies and brains. Though they reject metaphysical realities such as the soul *a priori* (prior to examination), there are convincing reasons to believe that humans have an immaterial aspect to their being that transcends the material and thus can continue to exist after death. Christian philosopher J. P. Moreland advances several sound arguments for the existence of the immaterial soul.

First, from the perspective of logic, we can demonstrate that *the mind is not identical to the brain* by proving that the mind and brain have different properties. As Moreland explains, “The subjective texture of our conscious mental experiences—the feeling of pain, the experience of sound, the awareness of color—is different from anything that is simply physical. If the world were only made of matter, these subjective aspects of consciousness would not exist. But they *do* exist! So there must be more to the world than matter.” An obvious example is color. A moment’s reflection is enough to convince thinking people everywhere that the experience of color involves more than a mere wavelength of light.

Furthermore, from a legal perspective, if human beings were merely material, they could not be held accountable this year for a crime committed last year, because physical composition changes over time. Every day we lose multiplied millions of microscopic particles—in fact, every seven years, virtually every part of our material anatomy changes, apart from aspects of our neurological system. From a purely material perspective, therefore, the person who previously committed a crime is presently not the same person. A criminal who attempts to use this line of reasoning as a defense would not get very far. Legally and intuitively, we recognize a *sameness of soul* that establishes personal identity over time.

Finally, libertarian freedom (freedom of the will) presupposes that we are more than mere material robots. If I am merely material, my choices are merely a function of such factors as genetic makeup and brain chemistry. My decisions, therefore, are not free; they are fatalistically determined. The implications of such a notion are profound. In a worldview that embraces fatalistic determinism, I cannot be held morally accountable for my actions, because reward and punishment make sense only if we have freedom of the will.

While the logical, legal, and libertarian freedom arguments are convincing in and of themselves, there is an even more powerful and persuasive argument demonstrating the reality of life beyond the grave. That argument flows from the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The best minds of ancient and modern times have demonstrated beyond a shadow of doubt that Christ’s physical trauma was fatal; that the empty tomb is one of the best-attested facts of ancient history; that Christ’s followers experienced on several occasions tangible post-resurrection appearances of Christ; and that within weeks of the resurrection, not just one, but an entire community of at least ten thousand Jews experienced such an incredible transformation that they willingly gave up sociological and theological traditions that had given them their national identity. Through the resurrection, Christ not only demonstrated that He does not stand in a line of peers with Abraham, Buddha, or Confucius, but also provided compelling evidence for life after death.<sup>2</sup>

— Hank Hanegraaff

### NOTES

1. Adapted from Hank Hanegraaff, *The Bible Answer Book* (Nashville: J. Countryman, 2004).
2. For further study, see Gary R. Habermas and J. P. Moreland, *Beyond Death: Exploring the Evidence for Immortality* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998).