

The Hope of the Apostolic Fathers

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The earliest Christians, in their struggle to defend Christianity within the pagan Greco-Roman culture, left us many written works. Some are apologetic in nature, others are pastoral exhortations to Christians. The term “Church Fathers” is given to the Christian authors who lived within the first five-hundred years of Christianity. These are divided into those before the council of Nicaea (AD 325), called the Ante-Nicene Fathers, and those after the council of Nicaea, called the Post-Nicene Fathers. A sub-group of the Ante-Nicene Fathers is called “The Apostolic Fathers.” This includes those who had personally been instructed by at least one of the Apostles.

The Apostolic Fathers (First-Hand Witnesses to Apostolic Teaching)

The Apostolic Fathers provide us with the best source of knowledge concerning the second generation of Christians who were instructed by the Apostles of Jesus. Of those who are known to have learned first-hand from the Apostles are Clement of Rome, Polycarp, and Ignatius.¹ All of these men lived during the latter half of first century, and in some cases into the second century.² The value of their testimony concerning the subjects we are discussing cannot be overstated. In addition to these, the *Epistle of Barnabas* is believed to also be of a very early date (about AD 100). However, there is no evidence or tradition that the author knew any of the Apostles first hand. He was almost certainly from Alexandria. His work no doubt reflects the views of the church in Alexandria, Egypt at the close of the first century. It is extremely important to understand that the writings of the Apostolic Fathers are pastoral letters intended to exhort and encourage fellow believers. As such, the purity of the apostolic preaching is stressed with no attempt whatever to find common ground with the currents of contemporary thought, or appeal to the Greek culture and world-view of pagans. These are letters from Christians to Christians exhorting them to remain faithful to what had been handed down and entrusted to the local churches by the Apostles of Jesus Christ.

The Ante Nicene Fathers (Second-Hand Witnesses)

The third generation of writers had no direct contact with the Apostles, and lived during the second century. Men such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus offer us glimpses of

¹ The writings of Papias who was also a student of John have not survived. He is mentioned by several writers, but only a few brief quotes from him have appeared in later writers, none of which offer insight into these questions.

² The *Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetes* has been listed by scholars among the Apostolic Fathers in some printed editions. However, later scholarship has shown that this book is more likely to have been written around the third or fourth century. “*Zahn has sensibly suggested 250-310. Harnack gives 170-300.*” (Catholic Encyclopedia article)

a slightly later age, even after those who had learned from the Apostles had already become martyrs. Irenaeus, for example, spoke of hearing the elderly Polycarp speak when he was just a lad, and he repeated a few things that he claimed to have heard from Polycarp.

These letters are not pastoral, but apologetic – presenting Christianity to hostile rulers, seeking common ground and validation from certain currents of thinking in the Greek culture,³ and defending Christianity against gross heresies of the Gnostics. These works are primarily in a debate format, addressing arguments offered by pagans, Gnostics, Jews, and heretical “Christian” groups, and providing counter arguments. As primitive Christianity as a movement began to engage the Greek – Roman culture head on, and theological and philosophical solutions were sought out to deflect the attacks against apostolic Christianity, some synthesis of ideas was inevitable. A good example of this kind of synthesis has occurred in recent times in the form of old-earth creationism. The temptation to make Christianity palatable to the culture and deflect the mockery of intelligentsia is a powerful force.

Consequently, the testimony and views of these men are of lesser value in determining the Apostolic teaching of the first century. However, they provide us with a sort of snapshot of the direction in which Christian theology was headed. While they mounted a valiant defense of Christianity against the onslaught of Gnosticism, the purity of the previous age was somewhat diminished by the mid-second century. There is a subtle slipping away from the views held by the Apostolic Fathers, and a gradual conceding to certain Greek ideas based on Greek philosophy. As the second century came to a close, Christianity suffered an enormous shift in its theology, thanks to men like Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen. The final outcome of the allegorizing tendencies found even in Justin and Irenaeus grew worse in Tertullian, and finally came into full bloom in Clement of Alexandria and Origen. By this time, Origen’s fanciful interpretations of Scripture had won many to his way of thinking, and Plato’s philosophy essentially displaced the Jewish foundation upon which Christianity was founded. In Origen, Jesus became an apologist for Plato, and the prophets were brushed aside by making them servants to Origen’s wild imaginative speculations.⁴

³ In Justin’s First Apology, ch. 8, Justin seeks credibility for the teachings of Christ by showing similarities to the teachings of Plato. In chapter 18 he appeals to the Roman practice of necromancy which persuaded them that there is judgment and life after death, and asks for the same toleration to be afforded to Christians who believe in a resurrection to judgment.

⁴ See: Origen, *De Principis*, Bk.II, ch. xi; Bk. IV, ch. I, (20).

Hermeneutics

The writings of the early Christians need to be handled and interpreted in the same way that we interpret Scripture, using the grammatical – historical method, and interpreting progressively (earliest to latest). Since these men were not inspired by the Spirit in their written works, progressing through them chronologically will provide us with a picture of how their theology gradually became polluted over time.

Clement of Rome

The epistle of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians is the most likely document to preserve the purest form of the Apostolic teaching. Its date of composition is almost certainly prior to the destruction of the Temple and priesthood in AD 70, since Clement speaks of the sacrifices and priests officiating at the altar as still being current in his day.⁵ This epistle was attributed by earliest Christian tradition to Clement of Rome, Paul's companion, mentioned in Philippians 4:3.⁶ The authorship is virtually undisputed by scholarly sources. It was written to address a schism that had lately occurred in the Corinthian congregation. Certain younger elders, having been lifted up by pride and arrogance, had ousted the older, wiser, and more experienced elders.⁷ That it was written after Peter's execution in Rome (AD 67) is also certain since it mentions Peter's execution.⁸ We therefore date this epistle to between AD 67 and AD 70. Its claim to apostolic tradition⁹ is strengthened by its authorship, by Clement, friend and companion of Paul and elder in the church at Rome. That one congregation of believers would write to exhort another congregation to return to the Apostles' teaching and example presupposes a high degree of fidelity in the Roman church to the Apostles' teaching, in both doctrine and in example. For these reasons it seems apparent that the teaching of this earliest piece of extant post-apostolic literature is our best resource in determining the apostolic tradition on any matter, including the fate of the wicked, the Christian hope, and the present state of the dead.

Both those who teach *the immortality of the soul* and those who teach *conditional immortality*¹⁰ claim that this epistle supports their view. The former group appeals to a passage in 1 Clement¹¹ which they interpret as claiming that Peter and Paul went to

⁵ 1 Clement, Ch. 41

⁶ See introductory note to the first Epistle of Clement in the Ante Nicene Fathers, Roberts and Donaldson.

⁷ Paul had warned Timothy against ordaining younger men as elders because of the potential for inflated egos to trump sound judgment (1 Tim. 3:6). He warned the Ephesian elders of the same thing (Acts 20:28-30).

⁸ Chapter 5

⁹ Chapter 51

¹⁰ Not only the annihilation of the wicked, but also what is referred to as "soul sleep"

¹¹ 1 Clement 5

heaven after their martyrdoms, and to a similar passage that refers to former elders who were also martyred.¹² In order to show that nothing of the sort is indicated in this epistle, and in fact it teaches the exact opposite view throughout, it is necessary to survey the entire letter and comment on every passage that in any way touches upon the destinies of the wicked and the righteous and the state of the dead. We will therefore consider all of the relevant passages in the order that they appear, followed by a short commentary on each one.

The following passage is the one that is used to claim that Peter and Paul are now in heaven.

“But not to dwell upon ancient examples, let us come to the most recent spiritual heroes. Let us take the noble examples furnished in our own generation. Through envy and jealousy, the greatest and most righteous pillars [of the Church] have been persecuted and put to death. Let us set before our eyes the illustrious apostles. Peter, through unrighteous envy, endured not one or two, but numerous labors and when he had at length suffered martyrdom, departed to the place of glory due to him. Owing to envy, Paul also obtained the reward of patient endurance, after being seven times thrown into captivity, compelled to flee, and stoned. After preaching both in the east and west, he gained the illustrious reputation due to his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world, and come to the extreme limit of the west, and suffered martyrdom under the prefects. Thus was he removed from the world, and went into the holy place, having proved himself a striking example of patience.” (Ch. 5)

To properly assess this passage, we must have a correct understanding of what was meant by the statements, “he [Peter] ... departed to the place of glory due to him” and “thus was he [Paul] removed from the world, and went into the holy place.” This is where the presuppositions in the mind of the interpreter enter the equation. For those who hold a Platonic view of man – that *man* is essentially a spiritual (non-material) being, a “soul” imprisoned in a body of flesh – the personal pronoun “he” would necessarily refer to this alleged ghost. However, for those with a Jewish view of man – that a man is living flesh animated by the breath of God – then the personal pronouns “he” in this passage would refer to Peter’s and Paul’s dead corpses.

Each side may wish to defend its own presupposition concerning what a man actually is. But both sides would be hard pressed to prove it from this passage alone. Suffice it to say for now that the above passage is inconclusive by itself, without imposing any presuppositions either way concerning the nature of man. There is no advantage to be

¹² Chapter 44

gained by claiming that “*removed from the world*” means leaving planet earth on a trip to heaven. The word “world” (κοσμος) never refers specifically to planet Earth in the Bible, nor is it ever used in contrast to heaven as a location. The Greek word means “orderly arrangement,” and refers mostly in the New Testament to human civilization, activity, and society under human government. Death itself removes men from the current human civilization, since they are taken out of all of the activities of the living and the authority of human government.

The clause “*removed from the world*” can be interpreted differently depending on one’s presupposed view of man and his destiny. For one group, which presuppose an immortal conscious ghost, it might imply the ghost escaping the body and leaving earth itself on its alleged ascent into the seven heavenly spheres, as Plato taught. For the other group, which presupposes that death simply removes one from the present activity and jurisdiction of the living to sleep until the resurrection, the same statement refers to the burial of the corpse.

The interpretation of the statements about “departing” and being “taken” must of course be harmonized with what Clement wrote concerning Peter’s and Paul’s destination after death. What is meant by “*the place of glory due to him*” (Peter) and “*the holy place*” (Paul)? If we take the word “place” as a reference to a specific location, then heaven might seem a likely candidate (if again we presuppose that a man has a ghost which leaves his body at death and goes to heaven). However, we first ought to note that the Greek word for “place” is often used in the New Testament in reference to a **condition** rather than a physical location. In 1 Cor. 14:16, Paul referred to those who occupy “*the place of the uninformed*” – meaning those who are ignorant. He did not mean there was a location called “The Uninformed.” In Hebrews 8:7, Paul wrote that if the Old Covenant had been faultless, “*no place would have been found for the second*” (a replacement covenant). He was not referring to a new location apart from Mt Sinai to deliver the New Covenant, but rather to a different condition in which a New Covenant became necessary. In Hebrews 12:17 Esau found “*no place for repentance.*” It was not that there was a specific location where repentance could only be granted (and Esau could not locate it), but rather his present condition did not permit repentance. Thus, “place” was commonly used for a *condition* or *state*, particularly when this word was used in conjunction with a quality (an abstract noun or adjective). And this is precisely what we find in the statements in 1 Clement.

Upon Peter’s martyrdom, he departed to “*the place of glory*” due to him. Paul was taken to “*the holy place*” after his martyrdom. The word translated “glory” actually means “honor,” or “high esteem.” Such terminology fits well with the manner in which Peter and Paul were entombed and their graves decorated, honored, and visited regularly by

the faithful who took courage from their example of steadfastness in the face of cruel tortures and death.¹³ Many persecuted Christians made pilgrimages to the tombs of Peter and Paul in Rome, and took strength and courage back with them to face their own trials. Both tombs have been honored and visited by the faithful from the very moment of burial.¹⁴ The Vatican was later built up around a small church that was constructed on the site of Peter's tomb. It was later greatly enlarged into what has become St. Peter's Basilica, the holiest site in all of Roman Christianity. Paul was entombed on Christian-owned property along the Ostian Way. His grave immediately became a shrine, and a small chapel was built on the site to accommodate the pilgrims.¹⁵ Both tombs are still visited today by Christians. Eusebius gives the following account of both tombs, quoting Caius of Rome who referred to their corpses as "trophies."

"It is, therefore, recorded that Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and that Peter likewise was crucified under Nero. This account of Peter and Paul is substantiated by the fact that their names are preserved in the cemeteries of that place even to the present day. It is confirmed likewise by Caius, a member of the Church, who arose under Zephyrinus, bishop of Rome. He, in a published disputation with Proclus, the leader of the Phrygian heresy, speaks as follows concerning the places where the sacred corpses of the aforesaid apostles are laid: "But I can show the trophies of the apostles. For if you will go to the Vatican or to the Ostian way, you will find the trophies of those who laid the foundations of this church."¹⁶

Thus, the statement in 1 Clement, *"when he had at length suffered martyrdom, departed to the place of glory due to him"* is consistent with what we know of the veneration of Peter's grave. The statement *"thus was he removed from the world, and went into the holy place"* also fits perfectly with the enshrining of the grave of Paul on the Ostian Way.¹⁷ Archaeology has demonstrated that these traditions are correct.¹⁸ These expressions in 1 Clement refer to the *places of honor* that Peter and Paul achieved with their example in martyrdom, which were exemplified by the shrines that were built up on their graves. These shrines already existed, and were well known to the Corinthians to whom

¹³ This practice was borrowed from the Jews. See: Matt. 23:29, Luke 11:47

¹⁴ Morton, H. V., This is Rome. *"It is extraordinarily interesting that Roman pilgrimage began at an...early time. Pilgrims did not wait for the Peace of the Church [Constantine's edict of toleration] before they visited the tombs of the Apostles. They went to Rome a century before there were any public churches and when the Church was confined to the tituli [private homes] and the catacombs. The two great pilgrimage sites were exactly as today—the tombs, or memorials, of St. Peter upon the Vatican Hill and the tomb of St. Paul off the Ostian Way."*

¹⁵ <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2006/12/061211-saint-paul.html>

¹⁶ Eusebius, History, Book II, ch. xxv

¹⁷ http://oce.catholic.com/index.php?title=Tomb_of_Saint_Peter

¹⁸ http://www.jstor.org/stable/1507661?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

Clement was writing. By this time, many of them had no doubt visited the “trophy” of Peter and Paul when doing business in the capitol city.

It is therefore apparent that this particular passage in 1 Clement cannot possibly settle the matter of whether Clement believed in the immortality of the soul or not, or in an intermediate state of the dead, because one’s presuppositions concerning the nature of man are largely the determining factor in how we interpret this passage. We must turn now to other statements in 1 Clement in order to ascertain the views held by the author, and implicitly the views of the churches in Rome and Corinth in the first century.

Coming to chapter 14, we find a fairly specific statement comparing the destiny of the wicked with the destiny of the righteous. Clement turned to Old Testament passages of Scripture, interpreted literally. This is very significant because those who teach conditional immortality and deny an intermediate state largely base their foundational beliefs on the same Old Testament Scriptures quoted by Clement.

*“It is right and holy therefore, men and brethren, rather to obey God than to follow those who, through pride and sedition, have become the leaders of a detestable emulation. For we shall incur no slight injury, but rather great danger, if we rashly yield ourselves to the inclinations of men who aim at exciting strife and tumults, so as to draw us away from what is good. Let us be kind one to another after the pattern of the tender mercy and benignity of our Creator. **For it is written, “The kind-hearted shall inhabit the land, and the guiltless shall be left upon it, but transgressors shall be destroyed from off the face of it.”** And again [the Scripture] saith, **“I saw the ungodly highly exalted, and lifted up like the cedars of Lebanon: I passed by, and, behold, he was not; and I diligently sought his place, and could not find it.** Preserve innocence, and look on equity: for there shall be a remnant to the peaceful man.”” (Ch. 14)*

There is no question that Clement’s understanding of the destiny of the righteous was to inherit the Land, as stated repeatedly in Psalm 37 and elsewhere. The fate of the wicked was to be removed and destroyed. The implication is clearly that God will purge the Land of the wicked so that His sons and daughters may inherit it forever. Such was the promise to Abraham and to his ‘Seed.’¹⁹ Clement both encouraged the faithful remnant in Corinth with these words and implicitly threatened those who were behind the sedition and scandal that was presently occurring. We can rightly conclude that both the hope for Christians as well as the end of the wicked was consistent in both the Old and New Testaments in Clement’s mind, otherwise he would not have used Old Testament promises and threats in the present situation.

¹⁹ See: Gal. 3:16

Next we come to a passage that illustrates how Clement viewed certain biblical passages that refer to the abyss and the underworld, terminology which is in dispute between the two camps.

*“The heavens, revolving under His government, are subject to Him in peace. Day and night run the course appointed by Him, in no wise hindering each other. The sun and moon, with the companies of the stars, roll on in harmony according to His command, within their prescribed limits, and without any deviation. The fruitful earth, according to His will, brings forth food in abundance, at the proper seasons, for man and beast and all the living beings upon it, never hesitating, nor changing any of the ordinances which He has fixed. The unsearchable places of **abysses**, and the indescribable arrangements of the **lower world**, are restrained by the same laws. The vast unmeasurable sea, gathered together by His working into various basins, never passes beyond the bounds placed around it, but does as He has commanded. For He said, “Thus far shalt thou come, and thy waves shall be broken within thee.” The ocean, impassible to man, and the worlds beyond it, are regulated by the same enactments of the Lord.” (Ch. 20)*

There are certain New Testament passages that refer to the “abyss”²⁰ and others that refer to things “under the earth.”²¹ Those who believe in the “immortality of the soul” claim that there is a place beneath the surface of the earth where the ghosts of the wicked dead remain conscious until the resurrection. They claim that the Hebrew word “sheol” and its Greek equivalent “hades” refer to this place. However, it is notable that Clement made no such connection of these places to the dead. He instead interpreted the term “abyss” in the way that it is used throughout the Old Testament – the deepest and unknown parts of the oceans and the subterranean sources of fresh water.²² The “lower world” is not the abode of ghosts, but the oceans. It is not unreasonable to conclude that Clement viewed the same language in the New Testament consistently with the Old Testament usage that he obviously adopted here. Again, this is consistent with how those who teach conditional immortality view these statements in the New Testament. It is not consistent with the language and arguments used by those who teach the “immortality of the soul.”

Next, we come to a passage which uses the same language concerning the nature of man which the Old Testament uses when referring to both the creation of man and also to his death – that man is simply a flesh creature animated by the breath of God, and that when God receives back the breath of life, man simply returns to dust.

²⁰ Luke 8:31; Rev. 11:7; Rev. 20:3

²¹ Phil. 2:10; Rev. 5:3,13

²² Cf. Septuagint: Gen. 1:2; Gen. 7:11; Gen. 8:2; Deut. 8:7; Deut. 33:13; Job 28:14; Job 38:16,30; Psalm 33:7; et. al.

*“Let your children be partakers of true Christian training; let them learn of how great avail humility is with God — how much the spirit of pure affection can prevail with Him — how excellent and great His fear is, and how it saves all those who walk in it with a pure mind. For He is a Searcher of the thoughts and desires [of the heart]: **His breath is in us; and when He pleases, He will take it away.**” (Ch. 21)*

From the beginning of the Bible, a living man is defined as a “soul” consisting of flesh made from dust which is animated by the breath of God.²³ Even animals are “souls” according to Scripture.²⁴ A “soul” has its component parts broken up upon death. The “breath” returns to God, and the body returns to dust. This is how “death” is defined throughout the Old Testament, and is the immediate fate of every man, both the righteous and the wicked.²⁵ Clement used exactly the same language to refer to death for the Christian. And he urged Christian parents to train their children with this divine knowledge. This view of death is a far cry from the Platonic thinking of the pagan culture around Rome, where death meant the release of a conscious ghost from the prison of the body, to go on living without the body. Clement’s language is consistent with those conditional immortality through resurrection, and clashes with the language of Platonic immortality of the soul.

For Clement and his readers, there was one hope beyond the grave – the resurrection of the body. Like Paul who in 1 Thessalonians comforts the bereaved with the hope of resurrection at Christ’s return, mentioning nothing of an intermediate state of blessing in heaven, so also Clement presented the same hope as Paul.

“Let us consider, beloved, how the Lord continually proves to us that there shall be a future resurrection, of which He has rendered the Lord Jesus Christ the first-fruits by raising Him from the dead. Let us contemplate, beloved, the resurrection which is at all times taking place. Day and night declare to us a resurrection. The night sinks to sleep, and the day arises; the day [again] departs, and the night comes on. Let us behold the fruits [of the earth], how the sowing of grain takes place. The sower goes forth, and casts it into the ground; and the seed being thus scattered, though dry and naked when it fell upon the earth, is gradually dissolved. Then out of its dissolution the mighty power of the providence of the Lord raises it up again, and from one seed many arise and bring forth fruit.” (Ch. 24)

²³ Gen. 2:7

²⁴ Gen. 1:20,21,24,30; Gen. 2:19; Gen. 9:10,12,15,16; etc.

²⁵ Eccl. 3:18-21; Eccl. 6:6; Eccl. 12:7; Job 34:14

Clement, like Paul, used a series of metaphors in reference to the destiny of the righteous, in each case omitting any allusion to an intermediate state, but going from death to resurrection with no apparent intervening experience for the dead at all. Clement looked to symbols of the resurrection as follows:

- Daytime gives way to night and sleep, followed by dawn and awakening
- Seed is buried in the ground, and then sprouts to life again – a metaphor Paul used of the burial of the Christians' corpse followed by resurrection²⁶

Of the "seed" metaphor representing the Christian's death, it is noteworthy that Clement used terms like "dry," "naked,"²⁷ and "dissolved," for the dead believer, and that *"out of its dissolution the mighty power of the providence of the Lord raises it up again."* From Clement's metaphor we learn that death is not inherently a glorious state for the Christian, but one of dishonor, as did Paul.²⁸ As Clement no doubt learned from his friend and mentor, Paul, victory over man's enemy death and hades (the grave) comes only at the resurrection, and this hope is the thing in which we can rejoice. Only then will the "sting of death" be cured, and "victory" over the hades (the grave) take place.²⁹ Such metaphors as these no doubt were meant by Clement to turn the minds of the Corinthians back to what Paul had written to them years earlier concerning death and resurrection.

Clement later returns to the same subject as follows:

"Do we then deem it any great and wonderful thing for the Maker of all things to raise up again those that have piously served Him in the assurance of a good faith, when even by a bird He shows us the mightiness of His power to fulfil His promise? For [the Scripture] saith in a certain place, "Thou shalt raise me up, and I shall confess unto Thee;" and again, "I laid me down, and slept; I awaked, because Thou art with me;" and again, Job says, "Thou shalt raise up this flesh of mine, which has suffered all these things."" (Ch. 26)

Clement had a habit of turning to the Old Testament promises of resurrection when speaking of the Christian's hope. The significance of using Old Testament promises is this: The hope of resurrection is placed in contrast to the present state of the dead in the Old Testament – being unconscious, without any memory, without light, without cognition, with no knowledge of God, being completely helpless to even offer praise to

²⁶ 1 Cor. 15:42-44

²⁷ Cf. 2 Cor. 5:3

²⁸ 1 Cor. 15:42-44

²⁹ 1 Cor. 15:54-57

God.³⁰ In such a condition, the idea that the dead will be raised bodily from their graves to the inheritance of Abraham and his 'Seed' provides the utmost comfort for the believer. If Clement adhered to the Old Testament hope of resurrection of the dead who are asleep, then it is no leap of logic to infer that he also viewed the current state of the dead as it is consistently portrayed in the Old Testament prophetic Scriptures.

"And thus He forewarns us: "Behold, the Lord [cometh], and His reward is before His face, to render to every man according to his work."(Ch. 34)

Once again, Clement turns to the Old Testament promises, this time from Isaiah 40:10 & 62:11.³¹ There is no hint in Clement of any kind of reward for the Christian prior to the coming of the Lord when the resurrection occurs. This is in stark contrast to those who teach the immortality of the soul, where judgment and reward (heaven) are given to the ghost at death, and the resurrection (recovery of the body) is merely an accessory added later if at all.

That Clement did not believe that mankind possess "immortality" as an inherent part of his essential being is quite clear in the following quote.

"How blessed and wonderful, beloved, are the gifts of God! Life in immortality, splendor in righteousness, truth in perfect confidence, faith in assurance, self-control in holiness!" (Ch. 35)

These gifts were received by believers, not by unbelievers. As is repeatedly asserted in Scripture, "immortality" is the inherent possession of God alone³² who is the continuous source of all life.³³ He grants immortality through the Gospel.³⁴ And man must "lay hold" of it by obeying the Gospel and continuing in it.³⁵ As Clement stated above, "immortality" is a gift of God for the faithful.

"By Him the Lord has willed that we should taste knowledge of immortality, "who, being the brightness of His majesty, is by so much greater than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." For it is thus written, "Who

³⁰ Please see my article on this subject at: http://www.oasischristianchurch.org/bbi_notes/Conscious.pdf

³¹ Clement's quote is slightly different than both the Hebrew and LXX, the last clause seems to partially quote Rev. 22:12, yet the first two clauses refer to God in the third person (as does Isaiah in both passages), while the allusion to this in Rev. 22 has Jesus speaking in the first person. The solution is most likely that the actual quote from Isaiah ends with the words, "before His face," and the last clause is the words of Clement explaining this in light of Rev. 22:12.

³² 1 Tim. 6:16

³³ Isa. 42:5; Acts 17:25; 1 Tim. 6:13

³⁴ 2 Tim. 1:10

³⁵ 1 Tim. 6:12,19

maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire.” But concerning His Son the Lord spoke thus: “Thou art my Son, to-day have I begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession.” And again He saith to Him, “Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool.” But who are His enemies? All the wicked, and those who set themselves to oppose the will of God.” (Ch. 36)

Here, Clement appeals to one of Paul’s last epistles – Hebrews – which itself is filled with quotations from the Old Testament concerning the hope of the believer. As in Clement, Hebrews is silent on any kind of intermediate state of the dead, and turns the believer’s mind exclusively to the resurrection and the inheritance of the Land that God promised Abraham – the Kingdom of God.

In the following passage, Clement turns again to several Old Testament passages that describe the fate of the wicked. It is utter destruction and annihilation in the flesh. Again, there is no intermediate state where the wicked are tormented as ghosts.

“Foolish and inconsiderate men, who have neither wisdom nor instruction, mock and deride us, being eager to exalt themselves in their own conceits. For what can a mortal man do? or what strength is there in one made out of the dust?’ For it is written, ‘There was no shape before mine eyes, only I heard a sound, and a voice [saying], What then? Shall a man be pure before the Lord? or shall such an one be [counted] blameless in his deeds, seeing He does not confide in His servants, and has charged even His angels with perversity? The heaven is not clean in His sight: how much less they that dwell in houses of clay, of which also we ourselves were made! He smote them as a moth; and from morning even until evening they endure not. Because they could furnish no assistance to themselves, they perished. He breathed upon them, and they died, because they had no wisdom. But call now, if any one will answer thee, or if thou wilt look to any of the holy angels; for wrath destroys the foolish man, and envy killeth him that is in error. I have seen the foolish taking root, but their habitation was presently consumed. Let their sons be far from safety; let them be despised before the gates of those less than themselves, and there shall be none to deliver. For what was prepared for them, the righteous shall eat; and they shall not be delivered from evil.” (Ch. 39)

That the punishment of the wicked is “death” as the Scriptures teach,³⁶ (not the torture of ghosts in an intermediate state, nor eternal torment in resurrected form) is clear from the following statement.

³⁶ Gen. 2:17; John 3:16; Rom. 6:23

*Those, therefore, who do anything beyond that which is agreeable to His will, are **punished with death**. Ye see, brethren, that the greater the knowledge that has been vouchsafed to us, the greater also is the danger to which we are exposed. (Ch. 41)*

Next, Clement adds some insight concerning what he meant in the first passage we dealt with concerning Peter and Paul having been taken to the place of honor due to them. He now referred to some of the faithful elders of the Roman church who followed in their footsteps.

“Blessed are those presbyters who, having finished their course before now, have obtained a fruitful and perfect departure; for they have no fear lest anyone deprive them of the place now appointed them. But we see that ye have removed some men of excellent behavior from the ministry, which they fulfilled blamelessly and with honor.” (Ch. 44)

Note carefully the words “deprive them of the place now appointed them.” We should ask, does “place” refer to a location? Or does it refer to a condition of honor? Clearly it is the latter. Again, when such statements are viewed against the historical backdrop where the bones and tombs of the martyrs were venerated and turned into shrines, as monuments of faithfulness until death, there is no need to inject Plato’s concept of the immortality of the soul into Clement’s words.

Finally, to illustrate beyond doubt that the “place of honor” to which the martyrs had been taken does not refer to heaven, but to their place of high esteem as demonstrated in the shrines built upon their graves, the following quote is sufficient proof.

*“Who, then, were they that did such things? The hateful, and those full of all wickedness, were roused to such a pitch of fury, that they inflicted torture on those who served God with a holy and blameless purpose [of heart], not knowing that the Most High is the Defender and Protector of all such as with a pure conscience venerate His all-excellent name; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. But they who with confidence endured [these things] **are now heirs of glory and honor, and have been exalted and made illustrious by God in their memorial for ever and ever. Amen.** (Ch. 45)*

The martyrs have been “exalted” and “made illustrious” by God. Yet, this place of honor is limited to “**their memorials**” – the way in which they are honored among the living as examples of faithfulness. Like all of the faithful of Hebrews 11, they have attained to the “*place among the godly*.” (Notice that “place” in the following quote refers to a condition, not to a location). Yet, the manifestation of this “*place among the godly*” is the resurrection to immortality.

*“All the generations from Adam even unto this day have passed away; but those who, through the grace of God, have been made perfect in love, **now possess a place among the godly**, and shall be made manifest at the revelation of the kingdom of Christ. For it is written, “**Enter into thy secret chambers for a little time**, until my wrath and fury pass away; and I will remember a propitious day, and **will raise you up out of your graves**.” (Ch. 50)*

Here Clement appeals to Isaiah 26:19-21 which reads as follows in the LXX.

Isaiah 26:19-21

19 The dead shall rise, and they that are in the tombs shall be raised, and they that are in the earth shall rejoice: for the dew from thee is healing to them: but the land of the ungodly shall perish.

20 Go, my people, enter into thy closets, shut thy door, hide thyself for a little season, until the anger of the Lord have passed away.

21 For, behold, the Lord is bringing wrath from his holy place upon the dwellers on the earth: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall not cover her slain.”

We will not here pass judgment on the correctness of Clement’s interpretation of verse 20, but only analyze it. His quote of the Septuagint here differs in some respects from our extant copies of the LXX as well as from the Hebrew. However, the fact that Clement did indeed quote this verse as a reference to the faithful dead being hidden in their graves for safe keeping is sufficient proof that he believed that the righteous dead remained in their graves until the return of Christ on the Day of the Lord. According to Clement, the dead were to “*enter their chambers for a little time*,” the time from their deaths until the resurrection. When we supply the previous verse as well as the one following, it is abundantly clear that Clement believed that the “tombs” of the saints were these “secret chambers,” since the previous verse mentioned the “tombs” of God’s people. Note that THEY are said to be in the “tombs” (vs. 19), not in some other receptacle of ghosts under the earth, nor in heaven. They themselves are now in their graves, and will come forth in the resurrection. Each grave is a “closet” in which the man is hidden until the great day of God Almighty when the wicked are cut off. It is difficult to harmonize Clement’s interpretation of this passage with either the ghosts of the saints being in heaven (where they need no hiding from God’s wrath), nor their being ghosts in some other place, where they would necessarily be in no danger of God’s wrath or judgment. Instead, Clement’s interpretation views the grave as a place of safety, sparing God’s people the awe-filled display of His judgment on the wicked at the end of the age.

We will conclude our survey of Clement of Rome with one final quote:

*“Let us therefore implore forgiveness for all those transgressions which through any [suggestion] of the adversary we have committed. And those who have been the leaders of sedition and disagreement ought to have respect to **the common hope**. For such as live in fear and love would rather that they themselves than their neighbors should be involved in suffering. And they prefer to bear blame themselves, rather than **that the concord which has been well and piously handed down to us** should suffer. For it is better that a man should acknowledge his transgressions than that he should harden his heart, as the hearts of those were hardened who stirred up sedition against Moses the servant of God, and whose condemnation was made manifest [unto all]. **For they went down alive into hades, and death swallowed them up.** (Ch. 51)*

In this passage, it becomes crystal clear that the hope of believers and the destiny of the wicked **presented in this letter** was “*the common hope*” of the churches in Clement’s day. The church in Rome was in the capitol of the empire. It was the place of the martyrdom of both Peter and Paul, the place in which both men wrote their last words before their executions, and where their tombs had been enshrined. The Roman church had been given the responsibility to pass on the Apostolic doctrines without dilution or mixture. Clement, one of the elders in this church that had witnessed the martyrdom of these great men, took his task very seriously. “*The common hope*” mentioned above was the Apostolic teaching on the question of judgment, afterlife, reward, and punishment. Clement refers to this as “*the concord which has been well and piously handed down to us*” – language that undeniably claims Apostolic authority as much as it does universality between the churches of Rome and Corinth. Nowhere does this “hope” preserved for us by Clement of Rome state or imply an intermediate state of the dead. Everywhere it affirms the teaching of the Old Testament, both regarding the fate of the wicked and the hope of the righteous. The final sentence above also implicitly confirms that Clement did not view “hades” in the way that the Greek poets and philosophers did (and that modern Christians do), but rather as simply the common grave of mankind – as the earth receives and dissolves the bodies of the dead. It is impossible to reconcile the statement that the sons of Korah “*went down alive into hades*”³⁷ with the Platonic concept of the immortality of the soul, and the current definition of “hades” by those who promote it. To go down **alive** is synonymous with going bodily to hades, since “alive” can only refer to the flesh. In short, to “*go down alive into hades*” means to be buried alive, nothing more. Both the Scriptures and Clement viewed hades as the “grave” – returning to the dust of the earth. And this is also consistent with what Paul wrote to this same church, when speaking of the resurrection of the sleeping believers from their graves, Paul rejoiced over the defeat of “hades.” “*So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying*

³⁷ See: Num. 16:30-33

*that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?' The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'*³⁸

Polycarp of Smyrna

The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians is also an important piece of post-apostolic literature. Polycarp was a student of John, and an elder in the church at Smyrna – one of the seven churches mentioned in the book of Revelation. This letter was most likely written during the first half of the second century.

There is little in this letter that can provide decisive information concerning the destiny of the wicked, except that they will not inherit the Kingdom of God.³⁹ However, Polycarp certainly agreed with Clement's epistle concerning the reward of the righteous being the coming Kingdom of God made possible only by the resurrection of the body.

"If we please Him in this present world, we shall receive also the future world, according as He has promised to us that He will raise us again from the dead, and that if we live worthily of Him, "we shall also reign together with Him," provided only we believe." (Ch. 5)

The omission of an intermediate state of the dead, or enjoyment of any kind of reward prior to resurrection, seems consistent in both Clement and Polycarp. He goes on to warn the Philippians against some false teachers within the churches who say *"there is neither a resurrection nor a judgment."*⁴⁰ This sounds very much like what Paul encountered at Corinth, for which he wrote the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians in rebuttal. It was a teaching based on Platonism, which because of assuming the "immortality of the soul" which allegedly ascended into heaven upon death without first standing before the judgment, made resurrection of the body completely unnecessary. Paul refuted this in the strongest terms stating that if there is no resurrection of the body, then Christ did not rise and all of the Apostles were false witnesses.

It is evident that the "resurrection" of the body, so that the man could be judged as a whole person before receiving a reward or punishment, was critical to Polycarp's eschatology. That he placed "resurrection" before "judgment" strongly implies that he believed they would occur in that order. This leaves no room for a kind of judgment of

³⁸ 1 Cor. 15:54-57

³⁹ Chapter 5

⁴⁰ Chapter 7

a ghost upon death to determine whether he would go to heaven or hell, and what his station in either place might be. As in the previous quote, the only hope placed before the Christian after death was resurrection followed by his inheritance in the Kingdom of God. He then states, “Wherefore, forsaking the vanity of many, and their false doctrines, let us return to the word which has been handed down to us from the beginning.”⁴¹ The implication is clearly that such a false teaching was not what was handed down by the Apostles, but rather the teaching previously quoted – the promise of raising us from the dead to an inheritance in the future world, the Kingdom of God where “we also shall reign together with Him.”

We now come to the ninth chapter which has been misquoted, mistranslated, and misunderstood by those who seek to show that the Platonic doctrine of “the immortality of the soul” and a heavenly destiny for the ghosts of the dead was taught by Polycarp.

*“I exhort you all, therefore, to yield obedience to the word of righteousness, and to exercise all patience, such as ye have seen [set] before your eyes, not only in the case of the blessed Ignatius, and Zosimus, and Rufus, but also in others among yourselves, and in Paul himself, and the rest of the apostles. [This do] in the assurance that all these have not run in vain, but in faith and righteousness, **and that they are [now] in their due place in the presence of the Lord, with whom also they suffered.** For they loved not this present world, but Him who died for us, and for our sakes was raised again by God from the dead.” (Ch. 9)*

The problem here is a poor English translation. The word “now” does not appear in the Greek text. Also, the words “in the presence of” are a very poor translation of the Greek preposition, “παρά” (beside). The Greek reads as follows:

“και οτι εις τον οφειλομενον αυτιος πορον εισι παρα τω κυριω”⁴²
And that unto the deserved to-them place are beside the Master.”

As stated earlier, the Greek word for “place” (πορον) is used repeatedly in Scripture for a state or condition not just a physical location. In Clement, Peter had achieved a “*place of honor*” as a faithful martyr. Similarly, in this passage, the mentioned martyrs were in their “*deserved **place** beside the Master*” Jesus Christ, who provided the epitome of faithfulness in martyrdom. That Polycarp used the word “place” for a condition or status can easily be shown in the eleventh chapter of this same letter. Referring to a man

⁴¹ ibid

⁴² http://bibletranslation.ws/download/Polycarp_Epistle_To_The_Philippians.pdf

named Valens who had corrupted his office as an elder, Polycarp wrote, “he so little understands the place that was given to him.”

Not only did the earliest Christians erect shrines at the tombs of the faithful martyrs, but they also recorded eye-witness accounts of their deaths to be circulated among the faithful so that they may take courage from their examples. When Polycarp himself became a martyr, an encyclical epistle was written in the name of the church at Smyrna glorifying (and perhaps embellishing) his martyrdom. Such was the manner in which the early Christians honored and glorified the martyrs, and venerated their remains. From this account we have a clear statement that illustrates what is meant by the “place” of the martyrs. *“This, then, is the account of the blessed Polycarp, who, being the twelfth that was martyred in Smyrna (reckoning those also of Philadelphia), yet occupies **a place of his own in the memory of all men**, insomuch that he is everywhere spoken of by the heathen themselves.”*⁴³

From the same account of Polycarp’s martyrdom we have the following excerpt, illustrating just how grand this “place of honor” was for martyrs:

*“But when the adversary of the race of the righteous, the envious, malicious, and wicked one, perceived the impressive nature of his martyrdom, and [considered] the blameless life he had led from the beginning, and how he was now crowned with the wreath of immortality, having beyond dispute received his reward, he did his utmost that **not the least memorial of him should be taken away by us, although many desired to do this, and to become possessors of his holy flesh.** For this end he suggested it to Nicetes, the father of Herod and brother of Alce, to go and entreat the governor not to give up his body to be buried, “lest,” said he, **forsaking Him that was crucified, they begin to worship this one.**” This he said at the suggestion and urgent persuasion of the Jews, who also watched us, as we sought to take him out of the fire, being ignorant of this, that it is neither possible for us ever to forsake Christ, who suffered for the salvation of such as shall be saved throughout the whole world (the blameless one for sinners), nor to worship any other. For Him indeed, as being the Son of God, we adore; but **the martyrs, as disciples and followers of the Lord, we worthily love** on account of their extraordinary affection towards their own King and Master, of whom may we also be made companions and fellow-disciples! The centurion then, seeing the strife excited by the Jews, placed the body in the midst of the fire, and consumed it. **Accordingly, we afterwards took up his bones, as being more precious than the most exquisite jewels, and more purified than gold, and deposited them in a fitting place, whither, being gathered together, as opportunity is allowed us, with joy and***

⁴³ The Martyrdom of Polycarp, Chapter 19

rejoicing, the Lord shall grant us to celebrate the anniversary of his martyrdom, both in memory of those who have already finished their course, and for the exercising and preparation of those yet to walk in their steps.”⁴⁴

Some have claimed that the statement above, “he was now crowned with the wreath of immortality,” proves that Polycarp was in heaven. Yet, such a claim would be blatantly contrary to Scripture. Paul made it clear in the fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians that immortality is given at the resurrection, not at death. The writer of this epistle no doubt meant that Polycarp had secured “immortality” for himself in the future resurrection by faithfully ending his life in such a glorious way.

In the nineteenth chapter, we find an interpolation by the English translators of this Epistle which is also sometimes used to support the immortality of the soul and support the claim that Polycarp was in heaven. This passage is a good example of how translator bias has skewed the historical record.

*“This, then, is the account of the blessed Polycarp, who, being the twelfth that was martyred in Smyrna (reckoning those also of Philadelphia), yet occupies a place of his own in the memory of all men, insomuch that he is everywhere spoken of by the heathen themselves. He was not merely an illustrious teacher, but also a pre-eminent martyr, whose martyrdom all desire to imitate, as having been altogether consistent with the Gospel of Christ. **For, having through patience overcome the unjust governor, and thus acquired the crown of immortality, he now, with the apostles and all the righteous [in heaven], rejoicingly glorifies God,** even the Father, and blesses our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of our souls, the Governor of our bodies, and the Shepherd of the Catholic Church throughout the world.” (Ch. 19)*

Notice that the words “in heaven” were added by the translator, and do not appear in the Greek text. Also, it was through Polycarp’s **overcoming** the evil governor by refusing to deny Christ that he “acquired the crown of immortality.” No doubt the writer had Jesus’ words in mind which He dictated to John concerning this very church in Smyrna: “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”⁴⁵ Polycarp obviously did not possess immortality inherently, as those who claim “immortality of the soul” insist. He acquired it by his faithfulness in martyrdom. Yet, as Paul makes clear, this mortal must put on immortality in the resurrection when “death is swallowed up in victory.”⁴⁶ The last statement, that “he now, with the apostles and all the righteous, rejoicingly

⁴⁴ The Martyrdom of Polycarp, Chapters 17-18

⁴⁵ Rev 2:10

⁴⁶ 1 Cor. 15:51-55

glorifies God” does not mean that he is alive in heaven, but rather that this written eye-witness account of Polycarp’s faithful martyrdom was being added to the other written accounts of the martyrdoms of the Apostles and other faithful martyrs. Notice that the church in Smyrna was keeping a written record of the martyrs, noting that Polycarp was the twelfth who was martyred in Smyrna. It was through these written records of the faithful martyrdoms that these men who were dead glorified God even now.

Ignatius

The letters of Ignatius were all written at the very end of his life, after he was arrested, and was being transported to Rome for his execution. These letters present us with a significant problem, however. There are three versions of them which do not agree, two in Greek, and one in Syriac. The Greek version believed by scholars to be genuine is much shorter than the other Greek version. The longer Greek version also contains additions that are known to have been of a later date. The Syriac version tends to agree with the shorter Greek version, but not always. Since it is generally agreed that the longer version is a later embellishment of the Ignatian Epistles, much insight regarding the direction of theological drift can be ascertained by comparing them. For our purposes, we will assume that the short Greek version is genuine.

Epistle to the Ephesians:

Short Version: *“There is one Physician who is possessed both of flesh and spirit; both made and not made; God existing in flesh; true life in death; both of Mary and of God; first possible and then impossible, even Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Ch. 7)*

Long Version: *“We have also as a Physician the Lord our God, Jesus the Christ, the only-begotten Son and Word, before time began, but who afterwards became also man, of Mary the virgin. For “the Word was made flesh.” Being incorporeal, He was in the body; being impassible, He was in a passible body; being immortal, He was in a mortal body; being life, He became subject to corruption, that He might free our souls from death and corruption, and heal them, and might restore them to health, when they were diseased with ungodliness and wicked lusts.” (Ch. 7)*

Syriac Version: *“There is one Physician who is possessed both of flesh and spirit; both made and not made; God existing in flesh; true life in death; both of Mary and of God; first possible and then impossible, even Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Ch. 7)*

In the genuine Ignatian epistle (and the Syriac version), Christ is portrayed in the same way that Adam was created, flesh animated by the breath of God,⁴⁷ with no suggestion of some sort of immaterial (ghost). The whole man Adam became a “living soul,” including the body. Thus man consists body and breath (spirit). However, the longer embellished version clearly portrays a Platonic view of man, that He merely inhabited a body. Since the longer version is later, this illustrates a shift away from earlier teaching.

Epistle to the Magnesians:

Short Version: *“Seeing, then, all things have an end, these two things are simultaneously set before us — death and life; and every one shall go unto his own place.”* (Ch. 5)

This passage agrees with the views of conditional immortality, that “death” (not eternal torment) is the fate of the wicked, and that “life” (immortality) is a gift of God only for the righteous. Consequently, man is not inherently immortal.

Short Version: *“Let nothing exist among you that may divide you; but be ye united with your bishop, and those that preside over you, as a type and evidence of your immortality.”* (Ch. 6)

Long Version: *“Let nothing exist among you which may divide you; but be ye united with your bishop, being through him subject to God in Christ.”* (Ch. 6)

In the short version, again we have “immortality” applied only to the righteous, thereby implying that it is not inherently common to all men. However, the longer version omits this, removing the opposition to the Platonic view of man.

Short Version: *“Let us not, therefore, be insensible to His kindness. For were He to reward us according to our works, we should cease to be.”* (Ch. 10)

This passage refutes the immortality of the soul, indicating that even the righteous would cease to exist if God judged us according to our works (apart from mercy and grace). Ignatius believed in the annihilation of the wicked – permanent death.

⁴⁷ Genesis 2:7

Epistle to the Trallians:

“Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the holy Church which is at Tralles, in Asia, beloved of God, the Father of Jesus Christ, elect, and worthy of God, possessing peace through the flesh, and blood, and passion of Jesus Christ, who is our hope, through our rising again to Him,” (Introduction)

As with Clement and Polycarp, there is no hope for the believer apart from the resurrection from the dead. Why do these men consistently skip any kind of intermediate state of bliss in heaven for Christians who die? The answer ought to be obvious.

“For, since ye are subject to the bishop as to Jesus Christ, ye appear to me to live not after the manner of men, but according to Jesus Christ, who died for us, in order, by believing in His death, ye may escape from death. It is therefore necessary that, as ye indeed do, so without the bishop ye should do nothing, but should also be subject to the presbytery, as to the apostle of Jesus Christ, who is our hope, in whom, if we live, we shall [at last] be found. (Ch. 2)

The “escape from death” is the resurrection to immortality. The state of the dead is not one of bliss, or why would escape even be necessary or desired? “Death” is man’s enemy, and the Christian will receive victory over death and hades in the resurrection, and not before.

“He was truly crucified, and [truly] died, in the sight of beings in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth. He was also truly raised from the dead, His Father quickening Him, even as after the same manner His Father will so raise up us who believe in Him by Christ Jesus, apart from whom we do not possess the true life.” (Ch. 9)

Epistle to the Romans:

“Suffer me to become food for the wild beasts, through whose instrumentality it will be granted me to attain to God. I am the wheat of God, and let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ. Rather entice the wild beasts, that they may become my tomb, and may leave nothing of my body; so that when I have fallen asleep [in death], I may be no trouble to any one. ... But when I suffer, I shall be the freedman of Jesus, and shall rise again emancipated in Him. And now, being a prisoner, I learn not to desire anything worldly or vain.” (Ch. 4)

We have the very same pattern here, death (which Ignatius calls falling asleep), followed by resurrection, with no intervening state of bliss or reward.

“For I pray that, being found worthy of God [through faithfulness in martyrdom]^{TW}, I may be found at their feet in the kingdom, as at the feet of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; as of Joseph, and Isaiah, and the rest of the prophets; as of Peter, and Paul, and the rest of the apostles,” (Ch. 5)

Why would Ignatius hope to be found at the feet of the patriarchs and Apostles in the Kingdom of God (rather than in heaven) if in fact he expected to fly away to heaven immediately after death? Obviously, his hope was exclusively the resurrection, and did not include an intermediate state of bliss or reward.

“For the beloved prophets announced Him, but the Gospel is the perfection of immortality.” (Ch. 9)

It is apparent here that immortality is a gift of God, not an inherent quality of all men.

Epistle to the Smyraeans:

“Those, therefore, who speak against this gift of God, incur death in the midst of their disputes. But it were better for them to treat it with respect, that they also might rise again.” (Ch. 7)

Here we encounter the same pattern. The destiny of the wicked is “death,” but the reward of the righteous is immortality through resurrection.

Epistle to Polycarp:

Short Version: For this purpose thou art composed of both flesh and spirit, that thou mayest deal tenderly with those [evils] that present themselves visibly before thee.” (Ch. 2)

Long Version: For this purpose thou art composed of both soul and body, art both fleshly and spiritual, that thou mayest correct those [evils] that present themselves visibly before thee.” (Ch. 2)

Syriac Version: “For this reason thou art [composed] of both flesh and spirit, that thou mayest entice s those things which are visible before thy face.” (Ch. 2)

The basic composition of man is described in Genesis 2:7, that of body animated by the breath (spirit) of God, which becomes a “living soul.” Thus, a “soul” is a whole person including the body. Both the short version and the Syriac version agree. However, the long version separates the “soul” from the “body,” in what appears to be conformity to the Platonic view of man.

Barnabas

The Epistle of Barnabas is generally acknowledged to have been written at about the same time as the preceding works. However, nothing is known of the author, or whether or not he was acquainted with any of the Apostles. Only one statement appears to offer his opinion on the destiny of the wicked and the righteous.

*“It is well, therefore, that he who has learned the judgments of the Lord, as many as have been written, should walk in them. For he who keepeth these shall be **glorified in the kingdom of God**; but he who chooseth other things shall be **destroyed** with his works. On this account **there will be a resurrection**, on this account a retribution.” (Ch. 21)*

And inheritance in Christ’s Kingdom through resurrection is the only hope offered to the believer. The wicked will be destroyed according to Barnabas.

Conclusion

There is no hint in the earliest writings of Christianity that the Apostles passed on the belief in the immortality of the soul. Those who had personal ties to the Apostles, and who wrote pastoral letters exhorting Christians to remain faithful to the apostolic teaching, consistently affirmed that the wicked will be destroyed and that the hope of the righteous is exclusively the resurrection to immortality. There is no hint whatever that any of them held to the immortality of the soul, eternal torment, or an intermediate conscious state for the dead. Those ideas began to creep in and gain a foothold as the next generation of Christian apologists sought to make Christianity an acceptable alternative to the religions and philosophies of the Greeks and Romans by adopting some of their presuppositions, and trying to show that Christianity was not as strange as first thought.