

Randy Alcorn writes:

“The sense that we will live forever somewhere has shaped every civilization in human history. Australian aborigines pictured Heaven as a distant island beyond the western horizon. The early Finns thought it was a distant island in the far away east. Mexicans, Peruvians, and Polynesians believed that they went to the sun or the moon after death. Native Americans believed that, in the afterlife, their spirits would hunt the spirits of buffalo.

The Gilgamesh epic, an ancient Babylonian legend, refers to a resting place of heroes and hints at a tree of life. In the pyramids of Egypt, the embalmed bodies had maps placed beside them as guides to the future world. The Romans believed that the righteous would picnic in the Elysian Fields, while their horses grazed nearby. Seneca, the Roman philosopher, said, "The day thou fearest as the last is the birthday of eternity."

Although these depictions of the afterlife differ, the unifying testimony of the human heart throughout history is belief in life after death. Anthropological evidence suggests that every culture has a God-given, innate sense of the eternal—that this world is not all there is.”

However... at least one Harvard psychologist thinks that believing in the afterlife is very **harmful** to us. ...

The January 29, 2007, issue of *TIME* magazine was all about the brain. The lead article, "The Mystery of Consciousness," was by Dr. Steven Pinker, Professor of Psychology at Harvard. ...While marveling at the

workings of the brain... Pinker clearly reasons that we have **only** the brain — no eternal soul. At the end of the article he writes:

“And when you think about it... the doctrine of a life-to-come is not such an uplifting idea after all... because it necessarily devalues life on earth. ...Just remember the most famous people in recent memory who acted in expectation of a reward in the hereafter: the conspirators who hijacked the airliners on 9/11.

Think... too... about why we sometimes remind ourselves that "*life is short.*" ... It is an impetus to extend a gesture of affection to a loved one... to bury the hatchet in a pointless dispute... to use time productively rather than squander it. ... I would argue that nothing gives life more purpose than the realization... that every moment of consciousness is a precious and fragile gift.”

No Christian should disagree that "every moment of consciousness is a precious and fragile gift"... but what difference should it make if you believe that when you die... you will face eternal rewards and punishments at the judgment seat of Christ...?? ... Pinker says such a belief is a **liability** — because it devalues life in the here-and-now. ... (Wow!... go figure!!!) Pinker also says, "*nothing gives life more purpose than knowing - **these** are the only moments we have.*" ... But contrast this with what Paul writes in Corinthians...

**1 Corinthians 15:19 (ESV)**

If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

C.S. Lewis offers a succinct answer to the question I just asked: “What difference should it make if you believe in eternal life?”

Perhaps one of C.S. Lewis’ most famous quotes comes from His epic book, Mere Christianity. There He writes:

*“If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next ... Aim at Heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in': aim at earth and you will get neither.”*

My sermon-opening quote from Randy Alcorn seems to indicate that God has placed eternity in the hearts of every civilization. ... And the efforts of Dr. Pink at Harvard shows that... in some of these very civilizations... like our own... there are efforts to wipe it out of our hearts. ... But we if we don’t aim at heaven... we won’t accomplish as much for the present world... and this would be the tragic result of Dr. Pink (and others) determinations... if they succeed at diminishing our belief.

In Christ’s day... the “after-life detractors” were the Sadducees. Professor Pink would probably have fit in very well with the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Sadducees...

In our study through the Gospel of Luke... today we come to the one and only interaction that Luke records of Jesus with a group of Sadducees. They tried to embarrass Jesus about His belief that there is an after-life... a resurrection. ... As we watch and see how Christ answers these religious leaders... it is my prayer that we would have our conviction about Heaven strengthened... because I believe what C.S. Lewis wrote is true:

*“... the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next ... Aim at Heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in': aim at earth and you will get neither.”*

### **Luke 20:27-33**

Jesus... the ultimate sacrificial Lamb has been in Jerusalem since His triumphal entry on Palm Sunday. He would stay four days... teaching in the Temple to large crowds. He was also being inspected ... and His perfection is under the spotlight. (Jewish families were to live with their sacrificial lamb for four days... inspecting it... looking for imperfections.)

However... unlike a Jewish family who hoped they would **not** find any imperfections... the Jewish leaders have been grilling Jesus... trying to find some way to trip Him up and discredit the Lord. They wanted to find an imperfection in Him and exploit it before the people. ... But they have not been doing a very good job... because they have not comprehended the fact that they are truly dealing with the Son of God... Who exemplified perfection. ... They think He is just another man.

These leaders have tried to entrap the Lord over the issues of the Lord's authority... and paying taxes to Rome. ... In trying to embarrass Jesus... **they** ended up being embarrassed. ... In trying to make the Lord look like a fool... **they** ended up looking like fools. ... In trying to shut the Lord up... **they** were left speechless at His wisdom and His answers.

As each attempt to discredit Jesus failed... these leaders became more desperate. ...The Pharisees flopped in their attempt... now it's time for the Sadducees to take a crack at the Lord. ... As we examine this

confrontation... it reminds me of the sad fact of how non-believers are many times troubled by the trivial.

You may have been in situations like mine... when I have witnessed to someone about their need to place a personal faith in Jesus Christ... but they want to talk about Noah's ark... Jonah and the whale... or UFO's. ... These topics are interesting to discuss... but they are trivial compared to a person's need for faith in Jesus Christ.

With the Messiah right there in their midst... having clearly identified Himself as such... the Jewish leaders want to debate with the Lord instead of discovering His wisdom and truth. ... First it was His authority... then it was taxes... now they want to debate the issue of the resurrection.

So much for the attempts of the antagonistic scribes... chief priests... elders... Herodians... and Pharisees. ... These elite Sadducees now decided **they** would have to show their hostile cronies how to put Jesus in His place. “...*Step aside second-stringers... let the big-boys take over...*”

The Sadducees had become a class unto themselves. ... During Jesus' time... the Sadducees had a lock on the line to be the high-priest. This was a tightly knit group of lay as well as priestly leaders. ...Josephus described them as very wealthy and "men of the highest esteem." ... As such... they were thoroughly rooted in this world. ... The temple scamming business... of selling animals and exchanging money... for HUGE profits... belonged to the Sadducees.

As a result the Sadducees had become thoroughgoing philosophical/theological materialists — a most convenient philosophy for

those who are wealthy and taking advantage of those with much less. .." They did not believe in life after death... and they did not believe eternal judgment awaited anyone. (Very convenient... isn't it?) ... According to their belief system... the persistence of the soul after one dies... penalties and rewards in death – were all done away with... The soul perishes along with the body... so..."*Just enjoy life now...*" They were in blatant denial of the resurrection.

How in the world could they deny this Biblical truth...? Isn't life-after-death evidence all through the Old Testament Scripture...? Yes... and here are three examples...

**Job 19:26 (ESV)**

*And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God,*

**Psalms 16:9-11 (ESV)**

*Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.*

**Isaiah 26:19 (ESV)**

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

So... if the after-life is clearly in the Old Testament Scriptures... why don't the Sadducees believe in it...? Don't they believe in Scripture...? Yes... but to them... Scripture only consists of the first five books of *OUR* Old Testament. ... The only Holy writings that they will recognize are the first five books... which Moses wrote... and are called the Pentateuch. ... And guess what? They do not find any mention of after-life in those first five books... Genesis... Exodus... Leviticus... Numbers... Deuteronomy...

Therefore... they reject the idea of eternal rewards and punishment... and can rather conveniently go right on - living only for today... scamming worshippers who come to the Temple.

It was all so simple for the Sadducee—there was nothing beyond. In regard to practical living... they believed that God never intervened. ... They rejected divine providence... arguing that everything in life is up to man. All in all... they were a tight little circle of mean-spirited... religious aristocrats — inward-looking... upper-class... unfeeling... philosophical materialists. Josephus says they were "indeed more heartless than any other of the Jews" and that "The Sadducees... are... even among themselves... rather ill-mannered in their behavior... and in their intercourse with their peers are as rude as aliens."

So the hard-hearted... steel-souled... priestly elite approached Jesus – (who I am sure they must have looked down upon as quite the country-bumpkin **Galilean**.) ... It was time for the important big-city boys to take charge.... and to finally put this “panty-waist” in His place.

They used a question on Jesus... that they had for years been silencing the Pharisees with... who **believed** in the resurrection of the dead. It was their classic “go-to” question for which the Pharisees had no answer. This same question... had embarrassed many Pharisees and put them to shame. It made them all look foolish... so why not use such a sure-fire question to fatally trap Jesus...?

The trap that they tried to set... is just as **evil** as the flattery that the Pharisees tried to use... as we saw in last week’s passage. Perhaps it is

even worse... because we see the Sadducees take a Scriptural principle and twist it like a pretzel.

**Deuteronomy 25:5-6 (ESV)**

*“If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her. And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.*

God gave this instruction to Israel... and made it part of the Law... because of His wisdom and His mercy. You see... when the Israelites entered Canaan from their 40 year-wilderness experience... and vanquished all the people living there at the time... land was permanently distributed to all the tribes of Israel... its clans... and its families. But if a husband died... his land could get transferred to a different owner... and his widow... who had no other means of support would have no provisions. ... So God instituted this system... which is called the Levirate Law... to protect widows from losing their source of income. (*Levirate* is from the Latin word "**levir**" which means brother-in-law.)

The Sadducees refer to this part of the law... to lay the foundation for their question to Jesus. ... Jesus had said of Himself "*I am the resurrection and the Life...*" – so they try and strike a significant blow. ... If Jesus could not answer their question... His image as a religious leader was coming down!

So they tell Him "the story of *One Bride for Seven Brothers*"... which... I’m sure would make for great reality TV today... The Sadducees offered a **ridiculous** hypothetical situation... in which the same woman married and outlived seven brothers but never had any children.

**Assuming** the presupposition... that life in the resurrection is an exact counterpart to earthly life... the resurrected woman would be guilty of seven different incestual relationships — eternal resurrection carnality, for sure! ... Or if not... she must somehow be designated the wife of one of the brothers. ... But which one? And How would such a selection be made? ...Or (and this – I am sure - is the answer the Sadducees hoped for) the entire notion of the resurrection **must** be absurd. ... So they waited for Christ to respond in their smug satisfaction.

But with their question... these men had brought God down to their level... and decided that because **they** could not make sense out of resurrection life... God **couldn't** raise the dead. ... Let me say right here that just because you don't understand or believe the Bible does **not** mean it lacks truth or credibility. Its credibility is not based upon you. It is true whether you believe it or not.

The situation that you face in your life... right now... may seem impossible to you. And because you can see **no** way through... does not mean that it is beyond God's perfect solution or provision.

How big is your God...? Don't make Him as small as you are!

When the prayer made in faith is not answered... and the healing for which many have sought does not come... remember that besides faith there is hope. ... Hope has to do with God's timing... and God's ability... which may be temporarily hidden from us or still future... just as faith has to do with God's promises that are here and now. ... To the person who has believed for today... but has not seen the answer come today... there

comes the call to hope. ... Hope says... "Tomorrow also is God's. And God is much bigger than my sense of – what is possible."

.....

The Sadducees did not consider for a moment... that God is powerful enough to **not only** raise the dead... but also create entirely new lives that would be different from what people had on this earth. ... It will be far more glorious than any human being can imagine. ... So limited was their thinking... that they could not imagine for one second... that our lives in heaven would be more than merely an extension of our lives here on earth...

Jesus responds to the question of the Sadducees. ... He affirms there is a resurrection and there are angels - both of which were **denied** by the Sadducees. ... The Lord gives us a glimpse of life in Heaven here. ... Jesus pointed out that there are **differences** between life in this age and life in the age to come.

### **Luke 20:34-36**

The resurrection life in Heaven will not be merely a continuation of life on this earth. ... Jesus states that those in this world get married to a wife or a husband. ... But in the age to come... there will be no **need** for marriage.

Marriage will not be an issue in Heaven... because true love will reach perfection. ... I am convinced that Gary Thomas has it right in his book... *Sacred Marriage*... that God's specific design for marriage... is to make us holy. ... I never knew just how much of a sinner I am... until I married Patti. ... It is only as I struggle with my will against hers... that I discover how

thoroughly **selfish** and sinful that I truly am... Before I married Patti... I know that I thought way too high of myself. (Now... don't laugh. Those who have been married... you know what I am saying is true... because it is also true about you!) There is nothing in all of life... that can reflect as accurately all the sinful elements in our life... as marriage. ... God wants us to see them... so we can confront them... so we can address the problem... so we can learn how to get outside of ourselves and care for someone else... more than we care for ourselves. ... That is why we have marriages here on Earth. They are to make us more holy! ... So... in Heaven... we don't need marriage... like we do here on earth. ... Our relationships with other people will surpass our earthly relationships... We will be our sinless perfected selves at our ultimate best.

Those who are resurrected to life... will have eternal life... and will not die any more... because they will be equal to... or **like** the angels. ...I love how Jesus works "angels" into this discussion... because they were something else that the Sadducees did not believe-in. Jesus is really sticking it to them. ... (But notice carefully)... Jesus is **not** saying we will **become** angels. ... The phrase "equal unto the angels" is from the word **isaggelos** ... which means that Christians will have a **nature**... that is like angels. ...We will be spirit-beings who are glorified to perfectly serve the Lord – just as the angels do now.

We will be like the angels in beauty and strength. ... Our bodies will have powers of which we now have no conception. ... We will have an enlarged mental capacity and a greater spiritual range. ... These bodies will be just like what Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 15:43...

### **1 Corinthians 15:43 (ESV)**

*It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.*

Like the angels... our new character will be faultless. ... The angels perfectly do God's will. ... Right now we pray... "*Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven*"... but **there** ... we will **always** do His will! ... **There** we will have no unrighteous desires... no covetous cravings... no proud thoughts... no depressions of spirit... no pulls of self-will... no inclinations to sin. ... Our habitual sins that God has *kept trying to show us* through marriage... will finally be gone.

Then... Jesus does something very remarkable here... Jesus added an exegetical corrective... by going right to the heart of the Torah... (the only Scripture the Sadducees would accept)... those first five books... where the Sadducees said the resurrection could not be found. ... Furthermore... The text that Jesus cites... is among the most famous in the Torah. It comes from the story of the burning bush... where God revealed Himself to Moses and then commissioned him.

### **Luke 20:37-38**

Jesus takes the Sadducees completely off guard. ... He could have referred to other passages that teach a future resurrection, but He met His adversaries on their own ground.

At the burning bush... God referred to Himself to Moses as the God of Abraham... Isaac... and Jacob (Exodus 3:6). ...These patriarchs were long dead. ... Jacob had been dead for about 198 years... Isaac had been dead for about 225 years... and Abraham had been dead for at least 330

years... but the spirits of these men were alive. ... God was not the God of the dead... but of the living.

Jesus' logic was: God's statement (phrased in the present tense)... "*I am the God of your father... the God of Abraham... the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*" ... makes **no sense** - if they are not **presently** alive.

If someone comes to you and says, "*I was your father's (or your mother's) friend*"... it may be because your parent is dead... or there has been a change in their relationship. ... But if one comes to you and says, "*I am your father's (or mother's) friend*"... that conveys two things: 1) the existence of your parent... and 2) the ongoing relationship. ... So when God said... **not** "*I was the God of Abraham*"... but "*I am*"... He was declaring not only Abraham's existence... but His ongoing relationship with him. ... To put it another way... if Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are nothing but dust... God cannot now be their God!

The answer from Jesus was an eye opener... and a mouth closer. ...The Sadducees did not know what hit them. - **Wham!** ... And the Pharisees that were listening nearby... had to **love** what was happening here... because Jesus proved their point about the resurrection... and He also answered a puzzle they had difficulty answering for many years. ... The scribes congratulated Jesus on His answer. ... And after this... **no** one wanted to try and match wits with Jesus.

### **Luke 20:39-40**

The "Country Bumpkin from Galilee"... made the sophisticated big-city boys look like fools... and "ouch!... it must have hurt! ... No one else wanted to

be put into **that** boat. ... The Sadducees had met their match... and had enough of the Lord.

Right here... they could have acknowledged that He truly was the Messiah... but their pride would not let them yield. ... They were troubled by trivialities. ... Don't make the same mistake!

If you do not know the Lord as your Savior... put your faith in Him today. Stop trying to find ways to discredit or disprove the Bible. It's **not** going to happen. ... Read God's Word... trust it... obey it... and put it into practice. ... Stop going through life arguing and debating with God that His way does not work. ... Just do what He says. There are many blessings that God has for you!

If you **are** a Christian... start focusing on this **reality** of Heaven as your eternal home. Keep in mind the truth that C.S. Lewis has written about:

*“If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next ... Aim at Heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in': aim at earth and you will get neither.”*

To a believer I say the same thing... Read God's Word... trust it... obey it... and put it into practice. ... Just do what He says. ... There are many blessings that God has waiting for you!

In 2006... Arthur Schiff died at the age of 66. ... You may not recognize the name... but I guarantee you've heard his voice. ...Arthur was a TV pitchman (like Billy Mays... the Oxy-Clean guy.) Arthur sold everything you

can think of. ... He accomplished this in 2,000 late night commercials. I know you've heard some of his commercials: "*Buy now!*" he would always say. ... Then he would describe his product's amazing virtues... then he would use a phrase he coined himself... "*But wait! There's more!*" Then he would give you one more bonus product to sweeten the deal. ... "*And you can have all this for an amazing low price of just \$19.95.... That's right... you heard it... \$19.95!*"

I don't know if Arthur was a Christian. ... If he was a believer... his words to concluded today's amazing passage would be - "*But wait! There's more!*"