



Conducted by
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“ In 1 Tim. 6:16 we read of God, ‘Who only hath immortality’ If God only has immortality how can we regard all other beings — as wholly mortal ? ”

On the face of it this is a fairly difficult question. I recall reading, some years ago, the Nichol-Bradley Debate, where C. R. Nichol had some difficulty in satisfying his opponent on this very passage. Mr. Bradley was trying to assert that if God alone had immortality then it followed that the rest of creation was indeed wholly mortal.

In my view Paul here is extolling some of the attributes of God, emphasising the eternal nature of God and underscoring the fact that He had no beginning and will have no ending—that He is truly immortal. His immortality is not derived from any other source. “Immortality” properly means, “not subject to death”: God by His very nature enjoys complete and entire exemption from death. God then, truly has immortality inherent in Himself—and God only has such immortality.

Any other creature enjoying immortality, or the promise of such, *derives* it from God. God is the one and only *source* from which we can derive immortality. God did not receive it and cannot therefore be deprived of it. This can be said only of God. By the same token we could say of God, “Who alone hath life,” for only God has life *inherently*. On earth, we have life, but life *derived* only from God. God alone has life in Himself: “For as the Father hath life in Himself: so hath He given to the Son to have life in himself” (John 5:26). As creatures of dust, therefore, we derive all things, our bodies, souls and spirits, from the God of heaven, creator of all things.

If the above statement be valid—that only God possesses inherent immortality and that He has also been liberal in bestowing the gift upon others—then it does not follow from the passage that all other beings “must be wholly mortal.” If God gives to men or angels the blessings of immortality, then we cannot be regarded as “wholly mortal.”

Angels certainly can't be regarded as “wholly mortal,” for we read in Luke 20:35, “But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage: *neither can they die any more*: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of

the resurrection." So, we are informed, in the hereafter we shall be as the angels, *i.e.* immune from death (at the resurrection from the dead). The great enemy of immortality, of course, was death, and because Christ has defeated this great adversary the gift of immortality comes to us from God through the merits of Jesus, the Son, "who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10).

Man also, a creation of God, cannot be regarded as "wholly mortal." The constituents of man are *body, soul* and *spirit* (1 Thess. 5:23) and it appears that only the body of man is subject to physical death (or is mortal). Indeed we do not ever read in the Bible of the term 'mortal' ever being applied to the soul or to the spirit; but we do read of "mortal flesh" (in 2 Cor. 4:11) and "your mortal bodies" (in Rom. 6:12 and 8:11). At the resurrection, however, man will be given a spiritual body, but a *body* nevertheless, which will never again be subject to mortality. Paul in 1 Cor. 15, talking of the mortality of the body, says that at the resurrection the body will be changed "for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (that is, this human body of flesh and blood will require to undergo a change before we can enter heaven with it (v. 50)). Therefore "we shall all be changed" (v. 52). Thus, at death we shall be buried a "natural" body but at the resurrection raised a spiritual body—we shall be buried a corruptible body and raised an incorruptible one; we shall be buried a mortal body but raised with an immortal body (v. 53): "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

The only "wholly mortal" part of man is therefore his body, but this will be changed at the resurrection and he will become as Jesus, or as the angels, never again subject to death.

It should be noted, in any discussion of mortality and immortality that true immortality (*or* deathlessness) is described in the Greek *athanasia* and is only thus translated three times—in 1 Cor. 15:53 & 54 and in the passage before us, 1 Tim. 6:16.

What immortality we have we have received from our heavenly Father, "who only hath immortality." We are far from being wholly mortal, as suggested in the question.