

PROJECT TITLE: HOPE AFTER DEATH
PROGRAM TITLE: FOLK RELIGION
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Don't look now, but like it or not, your culture's been infected with religion. You probably didn't notice, because it's not what you'd expect. Relax.

I'm not talking Saturday night masses... or Sunday morning sermons... or door-knocking missionaries.

I'm talking about a folk religion with "doctrines" shaped by speculation, myth, and tradition – with a little pop science and a whole lot of confusion mixed in.

This folk religion shapes the worldview of religious and secular people equally.

If you think that everybody is going to live forever -- in one form or another -- you're infected. If you think we have a dual nature – a physical body plus an immortal soul – you're infected.

If you're among multitudes who believe death frees the soul from the body, so it can live on in some spirit form, well then – you guessed it – you're infected.

Whether they're religious or not, many people assume these ideas come from the Bible. If they were right, I would have to agree with the atheists, philosophers, scientists, and comedians who refuse to take the Bible seriously. But that old Book is not to blame for these fantasies.

The Bible presents life and death as exact opposites. Death is not an alternative FORM of life. It's not life on a higher plane. It's not a ghostly spirit life as opposed to physical, material life. Death... is DEATH. When death comes, life is gone.

In the biblical story of origins, death was not part of Creation. There was no established cycle of life that included death. There was no plan for man to progress from one form of life to another. There was no need for that. Adam and Eve were the crowning work of Creation. They were perfect. They were made for LIFE. Real, physical, material life. Everlasting life in a permanent, loving relationship with the Giver of life – the Creator Himself. That was the plan!

So how did death get into the picture? Here's the story:

"And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die" (Genesis 2:16, 17 NIV).

This proviso against eating the forbidden fruit gave Adam and Eve a singular opportunity to exercise their free will, or free choice. Obedience would prove that they

believed God, their Creator. It would demonstrate their trust in Him as the Source of life and everything they needed.

Now the tempter, disguised as a talking serpent, was determined to break that trust. “You will not certainly die,’ he told them” (Genesis 3:4).

Then came the kicker: the accusation that God was holding mankind back from a higher plane of existence.

“God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5 NIV).

God had warned Adam and Eve about that tree, but the decision was theirs. Free will, free choice, meant that they had options: trust God or believe the snake. They chose the snake.

By rejecting God’s word and distrusting His motives they radically changed their relationship with Him. Alienated from Him by their distrust, and thus their disobedience, they cut themselves off from the Source of life. That broken relationship left the human family subject to death.

St. Paul, the great theologian of the early Christian church, laid it out in unmistakable terms. “...sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Romans 5:12 ESV).

Today’s popular folk religion believes the serpent’s lies. It sugarcoats death. It tells us that the dead aren’t really dead. Instead, they’re alive in heaven or hell or purgatory or some other intermediate place.

But if we consider God’s warning about the forbidden fruit we can’t fail to see that He was not talking about an altered state of existence. That idea came from the serpent who said, “Don’t worry. You won’t die.”

The truth, stark and unmistakable, is this: “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23 KJV).

But that’s not the end of the story. Here’s some great news! The major theme of the Bible is Restoration. It tells us that we can reclaim what Adam and Eve lost. We can be restored to eternal life in a relationship with God, the Source of life.

“The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23 KJV).

Right there is what our folk religion has missed. There is no life IN death, but there is life BEYOND death. Eternal life is possible for all of us, through a restored relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ.