

Book Reviews

Daring to Differ: Adventures in Conditional Immortality, Sidney Hatch, Brief Bible Studies, 1991, 144 pp. (Available from 21800 SW Hwy, #41, Sherwood, OR 97140-9130.)

We are all of us indebted to responsible scholars of the Bible who dare to question cherished tradition. These are the Christian trail-blazers who urge us to throw off the shackles of uncritical submission to "what we have always believed."

A distinguished example of one who demonstrates an independent, truth-seeking approach to the Scriptures is Pastor Sidney Hatch. His daring exploration into the question of Conditional Immortality (he defines this technical term for us in simple layman's language) is loaded with dynamite. At the same time it is an exciting personal account of the discovery of truth by direct contact with the Bible and Pastor Hatch's style of writing makes the theological content of his message accessible even to the inexperienced readers of theology.

The subject of this book is much too important to be confined within the learned discussions of specialists and professionals. The question at issue has to do with the nature of man and our destiny. It touches the very heart of the teaching of Jesus about salvation in the coming kingdom of God.

The significance of Sidney Hatch's challenge to a reexamination of a basic question about the Christian faith can hardly be overemphasized. He contends that the alien presence of Greek philosophy has long exercised its baneful influence over churches claiming to follow Jesus. The result has been a major confusion over what Scripture teaches about the state of the dead and the ultimate future of believers.

What is urgently needed is a thorough probing of the words of Scripture to discover anew the Apostolic understanding of death and immortality. Sidney Hatch, in a series of short, hard-hitting chapters, conducts us through his own personal pilgrimage away from the comfortable haven of orthodox understanding. With him we thrill to the more exciting if

sometimes dangerous environment of pure biblical teaching. The story is throughout compelling and invigorating.

There are certain categories of people who should definitely not read this book: those who have already decided what they believe and those who rely on a handful of proof texts to confirm their opinion in the face of a mass of biblical evidence left unexamined. *Daring to Differ: Adventures in Conditional Immortality*, will not be congenial to these people, because it asks us to question established understandings by examining the topic in the light of the broad evidence of the Bible. What's more, we are invited to consider the fact that the majority may have been wrong on a fundamental biblical doctrine—and wrong over the span of nearly two thousand years of Christian history.

The late distinguished Bible scholar, F. F. Bruce, remarked in correspondence with me that “people who adhere to belief in the Bible only (as they believe) often adhere in fact to a traditional school of interpretation of ‘sola scriptura.’ Evangelical Protestants can be as much servants of tradition as Roman Catholics or Greek Orthodox Christians, only they don't realize that it is tradition.”

This keen observation serves as a suitable introduction to the reading of *Daring to Differ: Adventures in Conditional Immortality*. Sidney Hatch's challenge is a salutary invitation to discover the reason for the sad fragmentation in today's Christian Church. Surely this situation must point to a doctrinal confusion which has overcome the Church. The key to this disturbing state of affairs is the intrusion into Christian thinking of platonic philosophy corrupting the pure truth of Scripture. Pastor Hatch puts his finger on the problem lucidly and with the complete conviction of one whose eyes have been opened and who rejoices with David: “Oh how I love thy truth.”

Anthony Buzzard