

Resurrection Truth: What is it? And what does it forbid?

By

Robert L. Whitelaw

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, and all that it implies about who He is, and about the final hope of every believer, is surely the very heart of the Gospel; for without that stupendous event there could be no good news of any kind for mankind, no Scripture we could trust, nor any hope of redemption and immortality beyond the grave.

In short, as the apostle Paul puts it so well in 1 Cor. 15:13–19, if Christ be not raised at least six dark things are true: (1) our preaching is vain, (2) our faith is vain, (3) we are false witnesses, (4) we are yet in our sins, i.e., without hope of forgiveness, (5) departed saints who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished forever, and (6) we are of all men most to be pitied.

It follows that, of all the precious truths in Scripture, the one on which Satan focuses his greatest attack and deceptions...is Biblical truth regarding Christ's death and resurrection. On this event, the pinnacle of Christian faith and hope, also rests every promise of life and immortality for the saints of all ages on Resurrection Day future. "Because I live you shall live also" said our Lord, thereby giving the reason why Scripture combines His resurrection and that of His saints on the Last Day under one label, "The First Resurrection" (Rev. 10:5–6), namely that God Almighty in raising Jesus from the dead has thereby given a guarantee to raise all His saints ... as one body in Christ.

The Ten Points of Resurrection Truth

1. *Adam, the father of mankind, was created by Jehovah God from the "dust of the Ground" to which He imparted "breath of life," i.e., the mystery of life. By this combination of dust and life man became a living soul (Gen. 2:7), yet at all times mortal (subject to death) being at all times dependent on air, water, and food, especially the Tree of Life as plainly stated in Gen. 3:22.*

From Adam God made Eve such that all their seed are reproduced in their likeness, each one being a mortal living soul from the moment of conception in its mother's womb.

Contrary to pagan delusions implanted by Satan (Gen. 3:4) and its philosophical formulations by Plato which infiltrated apostate Christian theology (i.e., Gnosticism) from the second century 'man' is not a self-conscious immortal 'soul' trapped in a mortal fleshly body, happy to be free when the mere body dies. The whole person is a soul; the whole person "returns to dust" (Gen. 3:19, Job 34:15, Eccl. 3:20) when life departs; and the whole person is restored to conscious being when life returns.

2. *'Life' is a mystery-gift from God Himself which He often calls "breath" or "breath of life," this being the usual evidence of its presence. It converted the lifeless form of Adam*

into the living soul which God called ‘man’ (Heb. adam). Life is a property of God himself (Jn. 5:26). Hence we find it spoken of as “breath returning” to God at death in Lk. 23:46, Acts 7:59 and Eccl. 12:7. here the Greek *pneuma*=breath was wrongly translated as “spirit” (from Latin *spiritus*=breath), showing the Platonic influence of the Latin Vulgate which prevailed over Christendom for 1200 years.

Life is *never* spoken of as a substance, least of all a self-conscious entity, added to or removed from the body. Its closest analogy today is in an electric lamp; electricity (still a mystery) converts a mere lamp-structure into a light-giver, yet nothing is added to the lamp when it is turned on, nor removed when it is cut off. So Jesus at death is spoken of in Isa. 53:8 as “cut off out of the land of the living.” Life, like electricity, will forever remain a mystery to science in this world.

3. *All souls in Adam die (1 Cor. 15:22) and death is the total absence of life, just as darkness is the total absence of light.* Therefore God calls it man “returning to dust” (cp. Gen. 2:7 and 3:19) and never changes His definition of death thereafter. (Let the reader study the pertinent ‘dust’ passages, Job 34:15, Psa. 30:9, 103:14, Eccl.3:20, 12:7).

When life is ‘lost’ (the Biblical expression used by all to this day), death prevails, and man as created has *perished* or been *destroyed* (both words are translated from the same Greek word, *apollumi*) Gen. 6:7, Jn. 3:16, 3:36 (i.e., having promise of never-dying life). The prolepsis principle is given in Rom. 4:17. And having guaranteed the resurrection of all mankind for Judgment Day (Jn. 5:28–29, 2 Tim. 4:1, Rev. 20:12–15) God speaks of all the dead today as “asleep” in Hades, the abode of the dead, until that day; but God sees all His departed saints as “asleep in Christ” (1 Cor. 15:18).

4. *Satan is the primeval and ceaseless enemy of mankind: their death is his goal, and The Lie (“thou shall not surely die”) is his weapon* (Gen. 3:1–4, Jn. 8:44, Rom. 5:12). That lie persists today in the all-pervading idea that “every man has a never-dying soul,” plus the various notions of an immortal afterlife in some Nirvana, Valhalla, or other beatific abode for ‘good’ men, or in an “eternal hell” with Satan for the ‘wicked.’

5. *God has appointed a Day of Resurrection and Judgment* in which He will destroy both Satan and Death, sorrow, pain and tears, and dwell with His saints forever in the New Heaven and New Earth (Gen. 3:15, Acts 17:31, 1 Cor. 15:26, 54, 2 Thess. 1:9, Rev. 21:1–5).

6. *Jesus himself, the whole Person, “tasted death for every man”* (Heb. 2:9), thereby making perfect atonement with God the Father for all who come to him in simple faith, trusting God’s promise of salvation.

Now there are some who, because of their Creeds, recoil at the idea of Jesus truly dying. Just his body died, they say. But the Greek word used in Heb. 2:9 for ‘tasted’ is *geuomai*=to taste, or experience, the very word used in Mt. 16:28 of the future death of the disciples. Furthermore, non can ignore the force of the 66 times the death of Christ at Calvary is mentioned in Scripture, always in Hebrew or Greek terms of ordinary human death. There is not the slightest suggestion of Platonic mythology about death being of the body only, from which the ‘soul’ flies away happy and free! In the New Testament 20 times we find Jesus’ death referred to by the Greek noun *thanatos*—death, 13 times by

the Hebrew figures 'by his blood,' 'shedding of blood,' derived from Lev. 17:11 and used to this day for death.

In the Old Testament we find Jesus' death five times in Messianic prophecy, Psa. 16:10 "thou will not leave my soul in Hades;" Isa. 53:8 "he was cut off from the land of the living;" 53:9 "he made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death;" 53:10 "thou (Jehovah) shall make his soul an offering for sin;" and 53:12 "He has poured out his soul unto death." These all clearly mean the death of the total Person, Jesus the Son of God, never merely the death of His body, as we find in the Creeds of Romanism.

Let us then be eternally thankful for that total death of our Savior, for without it there would be no atonement for our sin when we stand before Almighty God on Judgment Day, as the OT and Heb. 9:22 plainly require if sins are to be forgiven.

7. *God the Father raised Jesus from among the dead* (Greek *ek nekron*), and because He lives his saints shall live also (Acts 2:32, Jn. 14:19, etc.).

This vital point of Resurrection Truth is re-interpreted today by some evangelicals to fit the Platonic foundation of the "Great Creeds." This is done in three ways: (1) some claim that only Jesus' body died and was buried, while Jesus the real Person in 'spirit form' went on a preaching mission to the lost souls in Hades (supposedly based on 1 Pet. 3:19–20); while some even state that he passed directly from the cross to heaven, using Luke 23:46, leaving his body to be buried for three days; (2) others claim that Jesus, having never really died, simply raised himself the third day, based on his pre-cross statements in Jn. 2:19 and Jn. 10:18; (3) it is then claimed that the 2nd phrase about the saints living also because Jesus lives, means that because Jesus never really died, his saints never die either, but pass directly from death-bed to heaven (or paradise).

These three claims in effect thus teach that Jesus' death was a pseudo-death, that the atonement he made for his saints was a pseudo-atonement, and that his resurrection was also false, since he never really died in the first place. They must be weighed very seriously, because, if true, they have profound implications.

Claim (1) is refuted by the 66 unequivocal Biblical statements, shown under Resurrection Truth #6, that the Person Christ Jesus truly died. 1 Pet. 3:19 refers to God's Spirit, not Christ, preaching to the "disobedient...in the days of Noah;" Luke 23:46 simply says "Father, into thy hands I commend my breath; and so saying he expired" thus echoing Job 33:4, Psa. 104:29, Eccl. 12:7 which Jesus knew by heart.

Claim (2) is refuted by over 40 NT statements that "God raised Jesus from the dead" or the equivalent. The two disparate statements cited are then easy to reconcile by noting that in every recorded resurrection in Scripture (3 in OT, 4 in NT) the subject of course raises himself from bed or coffin after being empowered by God to do so.

Claim (3) is refuted by Jn. 5:28 plus over 40 NT passages, plus Job 14, which plainly show that the first sight of Jesus for every saint will be on that glorious Resurrection Day soon to come.

8. *Jesus is now reigning as Lord and Christ at God's Right Hand*, putting His enemies under His feet. Acts 2:33–35, Psa. 110:1, 1 Cor. 15:25, etc.

Psa. 110:1 is the most cited OT passage in the NT and the reader should study every citation in the light of Matt. 28:19. The binding of Satan (Matt. 12:29, Jn. 12:31, Rev. 20:2) and Jesus' present literal reign over heaven and earth at God's right hand (i.e.,

as God's viceroy) is the immediate consequence of his resurrection, to continue until Resurrection Day as promised in Jn. 5:28–29.

9. *Jesus will call His saints from their graves on Resurrection Day, and endow them with life forevermore in God's New Heaven and New Earth.*

The NT promises of this are abundant: Jn. 5:28, 1 Cor. 15:35–55, 1 Thess. 4:13–18, 2 Pet. 3:13, Rev. Ch. 21–22; and the OT counterpart passages in Isa. 11, 65, etc., must be read in light of the NT promises.

10. *Jesus will also call the unredeemed from their graves on the Day to stand before God in Judgment and be sentenced to the Second Death.*

This solemn and awful truth is found many times in the NT (especially detailed in John. 5:29 and Rev. 10:11–15).

The unredeemed are defined as “whoever was not found written in the (Lamb's) Book of Life,” this Book being the final witness to mankind of God's sovereign grace in the salvation of His saints. “Not by works or righteousness...done, but according to His mercy he saved us” (Titus 3:5).

The Second Death is the definitive label God gives to the final punishment of unredeemed mankind; it therefore is like the first death of every person, only this time lasting forever. The figurative definition God uses is “cast into the Lake of Fire,” a fire which will receive both Death and Hades besides the “sea” of unredeemed mankind (Rev. 20:13) after the torment of seeing the books opened, their works rehearsed, and their just sentence pronounced. Judicial fire is never used by God in the OT for any purpose other than total destruction, and 1 Cor. 15:26, 55, and Rev. 21:4, and 1 Jn. 3:8 tell us that Death, Hades, and the “works of the Devil” are to be “destroyed” at Judgment Day. Therefore we may rightly read the final sentence of Rev. 20 as the destruction of the Devil and all unredeemed mankind, never to be seen again in all God's universe, a fact re-emphasized in Rev. 21:3–8, 22:27.

What Biblical Resurrection Truth Forbids

Given the above ten points as the interlocking essential of Biblical Resurrection Truth, we may summarize those views, wherever found in commentaries, creeds, or confessions (often traceable to Gnostic or Platonic influence) which Resurrection Truth forbids:

1. Any view of the creation of man which teaches that God made man by adding some kind of immortal self-conscious immaterial entity called “living soul” to a created fleshly body, and entity capable of independent existence thereafter forever.

Note that this view, besides nowhere found in Scripture, has two serious objections: (1) it in effect agrees with Satan's lie in Gen. 3:4 and forces a non-Biblical definition of death (usually called ‘spiritual death’) to avoid making God a liar; and (2) it opens the door to the idea of eternal human pre-existence, and even pagan reincarnations, by reading *spirit* in Eccl. 12:7 as this kind of soul, which one finds in the Westminster Confession, Art. XXXII, “after death...their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence immediately return to God who gave them.”

2. Any view of man's death which teaches it to be continuance of life of self-conscious existence in some other state or realm, or present life "separated from God."

3. Any view of Satan that denies his existence, his power (within God's permission), or his final destruction, as promised in Gen. 3:15 and Rev. 20:10.

4. Any view that denies that all men die, saint and sinner alike, passing into Hades in a state of no knowledge, no memory, no life, which God pictures by the word 'sleep.' Or conversely, any view that teaches that the 'wicked' at death pass directly into some form of conscious torment before Judgment Day, while the 'righteous' pass directly into 'heaven' to be with Christ, contradicting Job 14:12-15, 1 Thess. 4:17, Titus 2:13, 1 Jn. 3:2, and a host of like NT passages.

5. Any view that denies that our Lord Jesus, the whole Person, truly died on the Cross and passed into Hades as all men do at death, until God raised Him the third day; or conversely, that teaches that He raised himself, implying that he was not truly dead.

6. Any view that denies that God has appointed a day in which our risen Lord, now reigning with all power over heaven and earth, will call the saints of all ages from their graves (i.e., their death, asleep in Christ) unto the "resurrection of life," and on that day receive immortal life forever as promised in 1 Cor. 15:54.

7. Any view that denies that God has likewise appointed a day in which Christ will call forth the unredeemed of all mankind from their sleep of death to the "resurrection of damnation" to stand before God in judgment for the first time.

8. Any view that denies that the sole basis on which the saints receive immortal life in the New Heaven and New Earth on Judgment Day will be having "their names found written in the Book of Life" by the perfect atonement accomplished by Jesus' death; or conversely teaching that their salvation was partly earned by their good works.

9. Any view that asserts that the Second Death (pictured in Rev. 20 and 21 as a "Lake of Fire") is a place of perpetual torment rather than of eternal destruction for all that is cast therein; or conversely, that it is immortality in pain and misery for Satan and the unredeemed (from which perhaps God might some day give them reprieve!), thereby changing Rom. 6:23 to read "the wages of sin is eternal life in misery..."

10 With these criteria before us, plus the warnings of the Apostle in 1 Jn. 2:18-28, let the student of Scripture judge for himself all such denials of Resurrection Truth heard in many quarters today, even by saints honestly ignorant of their import.

Copyright, 1990, Pastor's Library Foundation. This article may be copied freely for wider distribution, providing that the source from which it is taken is suitably acknowledged. (Acknowledgment: Resurrection Magazine, Volume 93, Number 4, 1990; published by Pastor's Library Foundation, Sterling, VA.) This notice must remain attached to this article.
