

DEAD or ALIVE

By

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At the core of the Christian faith there are certain facts which the Scriptures make crystal clear. To be Christian one must believe them. To deny them is to deny the faith.

Satan has succeeded in taking each of these basic truths, surrounding it with pagan rites and superstition, and finally passing off the lie for the truth. For example, the incarnation, the virgin birth of Jesus into humanity, is essential to The Faith. But it has been submerged in all the pagan trappings of Christmas until the purpose of Christ's becoming flesh is practically unknown and generally thought to be a kind of good-will gesture on the part of a beneficent God for the sake of making a great "brotherhood" out of rebellious and evil men.

Another essential object of faith is the fact that Christ died for our sins. His death can be fully appreciated only by recognizing the final death that is due to man for his sin. The pagan world does not recognize any such final death; therefore, the death of Jesus is held as a mystical and inexpressible display of love and hate; the cross becomes an object of worship, and the events surrounding the crucifixion becomes pegs on which to hang Good Friday orations where all the dignitaries of the religious community may display their erudition, carefully omitting any reference to the fact that death is the penalty for sin, and that God put Jesus to death in place of the believer. (Rom. 8:3, II Cor. 5:21, I Pet. 2:34, Isaiah 53:8).

The shameful criminality of sin which was born in death by Jesus is lost in the deeply matted layers of interwoven tradition, capped by an ornamental cross which decorates the clothing of the worshippers and all the appointments in the house where they worship. More and more Christ's death is seen merely as a product of man's hate and stupidity, rather than a judgmental act of God. Men hold it as a terrible human blunder instead of a Divine act of justice, as the depth of tragedy instead of the height of victory. As Paul wrote, it is a stumbling block to the blind and unbelieving.

While the incarnation and the atoning death of Jesus have been skillfully restructured so that the truth is cleverly concealed, it is on the resurrection that Satan had done his greatest snow job. Listen in on most any funeral and you will hear the idea expressed that the dead person has not died after all, but has been set free from the prison-house of the flesh and now is enjoying the reward of Christ in celestial halls of glory. He doesn't need a resurrection! If to be free of a body is desirable and if a person can enjoy immortality without it, then resurrection is the last thing one would want, for resurrection means the resurrection of the body from death — from the grave. Nevertheless, the pagan idea still persists that the body is not any essential part of a person, but rather an evil appendage to be tolerated in this world, to be rid of forever.

This idea prevails at Easter time, when preachers and editors speak of the resurrection as a "*symbol*" of never-ending life. Easter-eggs and bunny rabbits, springing flowers and new clothing for the Easter parade, all speak of the pagan rites of Eastre, the pagan goddess of fertility, after which the day is named. This we might expect from the world of unbelief. But, alas! In the church it is often not much different. The resurrection

of Jesus is said to prove that man does not die. It shows that He lives in men's hearts. It is a kind of prod by God to give man faith for another year, etc. Many conservative preachers are staunch in declaring that Christ arose bodily from the grave, proving His Deity and His claims, but they fail to see any connection between His physical resurrection and man's own resurrection from death. Others contend that the resurrection is only spiritual. One Bible College representative, determined to straighten out this preacher, insisted that Christ's resurrection proves that nobody dies, but that he just goes on living and being the same person forever.

What is *RESURRECTION*?

Where Jesus was concerned it was the restoring of life from the dead. It was not the mere continuation of something that did not die. Christ's death was real, and involved His whole person. "I lay down my life, that I may take it up again," he said (John 10:17). He "poured out His soul unto death" (Isa. 53:12). When He appeared to the apostle John, in the Revelation, He said, "I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore" (Rev. 1:18). His was not the spiritual continuation of something immaterial. The apostles knew that He lay in the tomb, but when they went there, the body was missing. Then the angel appeared, saying "He is not here; for he is risen...Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matt. 28:6). It was not until the *BODY* was gone from the tomb that Jesus was said to have risen and to be alive again. The apostles, who were slow to believe such a phenomenon, were told, "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see, for a spirit has not flesh and bones, as you behold me having" (Luke 24:39).

Jesus was raised up from death as a *MAN*. He did not cast of His human form at His ascension, for the angel stated the He would come again in the way the apostles saw Him depart. Even *NOW*, Scripture states that "in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). Jesus is an eternal man, resurrected from the dead never to die again, therefore, He is said to be *IMMORTAL*. In fact, He is said to be the *only one who has immortality* (I Tim. 6:16).

That which is true of Jesus in His resurrection and immortal condition will ultimately be true of all Christians. "For whom He foreknew, He also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom. 8:29). Christ is the firstborn from the dead. But in the last day He will raise up all His brothers. John does not leave any doubt as to the destiny of the faithful. "We shall be like him," he writes (I John 3:2).

Christ's resurrection does *NOT* say that men do not die. Rather it demonstrates that all who are in Christ will one day be raised up as He was. The Resurrection does *NOT* take place at death. There is a time appointed when *ALL* the dead shall rise. "For the hour comes, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28–29). When that hour comes it will be resurrected bodies that will appear. It should be noted that immortality is *NOT* promised to the wicked. There is no scripture that offers any kind of life or eternity to the wicked. They are raised to be judged and put to death in the Lake of Fire.

But the saved have a marvelous experience awaiting. Paul explains that we will be given bodies that are "incorruptible," "glorious," "powerful," and "spiritual" (I Cor. 15:42–44). It is significant that where Paul used the term "spiritual" he used it in describing the *body* — a "*spiritual body*." It is too bad that where the Holy Spirit clearly

connects *spiritual* with *body*, most religious thinking carefully omits the body, and speaks in terms of a mystical spirit-life.

If to get rid of the body were the ambition of all God's people, then we might well wonder why Jesus was resurrected in an eternal body. If death is the beginning of life, as some say, then it could hardly be said that Jesus met the penalty for our sin by dying, and the resurrection would prove nothing. But the Bible hold that death is a curse and the penalty for sin, and the resurrection is the antithesis of death. Death is to lose life. Resurrection is to have it restored. This is the simple and profound message of the Gospel.

The world needs desperately to know this "good news." We who know it need to apply it. "Everyone that has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as He is pure" (I John 3:3). This is our one and only hope, "who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:23).

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