

LIKE HIM

By

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In the old creed, before the Reformation, believers would say, “I believe in the resurrection of the flesh.” In this they simply stated the basic and essential hope of the Christian faith, that at the end of the world the dead believers would be raised up to life, never to die again.

After the Reformation, when the creed was translated into English, it came out “resurrection of the body.” But the older version said more, for Christ made it a point that it was in the flesh that He was resurrected. Of course, “flesh” did not merely mean “meat”, as we generally use the term, but meant the entire human nature, which at the resurrection was made immortal.

While a popular motto declares, “no creed but Christ,” it remains a fact that unless one has a definite belief (“credo” – I believe) in the resurrection, he doesn't believe the gospel. The elimination of any definitive faith concerning the resurrection is a great loss to the Christian.

The resurrection of the flesh applies to ALL Christians, not just to Christ. A great amount of argument has taken place over the resurrection of Jesus. But, alas, after establishing faith in His resurrection, the defenders of the faith fail to apply the logical conclusion: the resurrection of believers. The resurrection of Jesus proves His deity, His integrity, and His power. But why leave off the most significant point: that it proves the ultimate resurrection of all the redeemed?

The fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians, often named the “Resurrection Chapter”, was written NOT to argue for the resurrection of Jesus, but to establish the resurrection of the redeemed. It refutes the Greek concept of bodiless immortality of the soul, stating that if there is not to be a resurrection, the dead have perished (verse 18).

Paul assumed that the Corinthians believed in the resurrection of Jesus, for they had heard, received, believed and still held to the gospel which he had preached. This gospel, Paul declared, is the fact that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4)

Then he asked, “If Christ is preached that he hath been raised from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? **BUT IF THERE IS NO RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD, NEITHER HATH CHRIST BEEN RAISED**” (Verses 12, 13). The argument of Paul is this: Christ was a human being, born of woman. If it is impossible for the dead to be raised, and if the race of humanity is not to be raised,

then Christ was not raised! Moreover, Paul wrote, “And if Christ hath not been raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (Verses 17, 18).

Therefore, the entire Christian system comes to nothing, if the dead are not to be raised. Christian faith not only embraces the fact of Christ's resurrection, but must include the honest belief in our OWN resurrection from the dead.

Failure to preach and teach the bodily resurrection has left the door open to all kinds of ideas about life after death. Traditions, superstitions, and wishes without basis in fact prohibit many from the joy and peace of a realistic hope of a future life. For example, when a child dies it seems to be a comforting thought to suggest that the child is now one of God's angels. The idea contradicts Biblical teaching, both of angels and the state of the dead. But, nevertheless, it is amazing how many sympathy cards, funeral poems, and even funeral sermons are geared to this idea. The bereaved parent may not consciously adopt the belief that people become angels, but subconsciously the thought is welcome and clouds his view of the resurrection hope.

Others shrink from the resurrection because of their experience of physical suffering. For many people the body has been the source of nothing but pain and sorrow. A woman once said to me, “I don't want to have a body in heaven; I've had too much trouble with this one.” In the words of Jesus she “errs, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God.” The Bible tells us that the heavens and the earth are to be destroyed, so that we “look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13). It describes the redeemed as coming FROM heaven to that new earth to live (Rev. 21:1-4, 10).

The new resurrected body will certainly not be plagued with diseases, deformities nor aging, and neither will it be the cause of any temptation nor sin. The body is “Sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15:42-44). Note that while it is called “spiritual”, it is still called a body. It will still be OUR bodies raised up, not something else. Jesus said “destroy THIS temple, and ... I will raise IT up again.”

The resurrected body will know neither weariness nor fatigue, nor hunger, nor thirst. It will not be subject to pain, disease, suffering or death. “Death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow” (Rev. 21:4). “For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor. 15:52).

“Resurrection,” Oscar Cullman has written, “is a positive assertion: the whole man, who has really died, is recalled to life by a new act of creation by God. Something has happened – a miracle of creation! For something has also happened previously, something fearful: life formed by God has been destroyed” (*Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* Macmillan, New York).

Another obstacle to resurrection – faith is the teaching that it is the “soul”, referring to an unseen spiritual nature, which reaps the reward of life or death. The idea is that everyone possesses an “immortal soul”, and that it is that immortal portion that is to live on in heaven or hell. This concept did not originate with the Bible. Scripture says that “This mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:53). If we must “put on immortality”, then it is evident that we do not have it now.

At present Christ is the only one who has immortality (1 Timothy 6:16). Moreover, the promise of immortality is made only to believers, not to the unredeemed. Eternal life is never promised to the unbeliever; his dismal and horrible expectation is in the lake of fire which is called “the second death.”

The “soul” which we seek to save is not some unseen portion of man, but the total man (Genesis 2:7).

The best idea of our own resurrection comes from the resurrection of Christ, who is the “first fruits of them that sleep.” Paul teaches that we will be raised as He was (Romans 6). John writes that “we shall be like Him” (1 John 3:2). We can conclude, then, that our bodies will be radiant and beautiful, glorified in their own brightness. “Then shall the righteous shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13).

In His glorious body, resurrected and made immortal, Jesus lives today. When He returns, His splendor will be dazzling and thrilling, “for we shall see him as he is,” and then “we shall be like him.” (1 In. 3:2) It is at His coming that Christ “shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory” (Phil. 3:21).

Finally, in our risen bodies we will exercise all the qualities of the five senses which are given for the glory of God. Our senses were created by God as a part of our being with which to enjoy the fellowship of God and the glory of His creation. It is the abuse and misuse of the senses that is sinful.

But in the resurrection the senses will bring us the true joy and happiness for which we were created, in a world free from sin and temptation. Job said, “I know that my redeemer lives, and he shall stand at last upon the earth, and after my skin is destroyed, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:25-26). Although Job has been dead for millenniums, according to the promise he shall be resurrected and with his own eyes shall behold the glory of the King.

Periodic news reports remind us of the mortality of man. Death may come painfully and lingeringly as a dread disease, or suddenly in a traffic crash or in the unleashing of nuclear power. No wonder the apostle speaks of our race as people “who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:15).

Such is the outlook for the agnostic, the new “in” group who think that even “God is dead,” and the scared people who would rather be “red than dead.” Theirs is a miserable

prospect and pitiful. But for all who receive the gospel, who are ransomed from sin and death, by the death of Jesus, there is peace now and the prospect of a glorious resurrection. The sting is removed from death. Eternal life is not an ethereal, ghost-like existence in some sky. It is not mere continuation of mind or thought after death nor a weird reincarnation. It will be a restoration of life to the one who died, in a state that is perfect, with the added quality of immortality (deathlessness) and in a perfect environment.

As Paul suggested, the glories we may expect at resurrection time are beyond our present understanding (Romans 8), but let us rejoice in that which IS revealed. It is the motive and incentive to the lost, as well as to the Christian. That a man need not die forever, but might live forever is the gist of the “good news.” It is the whole purpose of the gospel, for Christ “brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10).

To the redeemed, the resurrection is the incentive to perfect one's life after Christ's example, for “we shall be LIKE HIM ... and everyone that has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:2-3).

The fact that we are to be people in the new creation is the reason we are now being taught and warned how godly people should live. It is the knowledge of our future immortality that motivates us in the present world. The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit, that we are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him” (Romans 8:16-17).

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