

## Resurrection, is it For Real?

By

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*“Behold, I make all things new”* (Rev. 21:5).

Does “resurrection” mean “spiritual” hope, or does it refer to a body restored? Was the resurrection of Jesus a historical fact, or only “Myth” used to convey a “deeper spiritual truth” as many are saying? Does belief in the resurrection have anything to do with YOUR salvation?

These are important questions, because the assurance of eternal life is equated in Scripture to the resurrection.

The gospel which the apostles preached was that “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures ...” (1 Cor. 15:3). Wherever they preached, the burden of assurance was that Christ, who had died, was now alive.

The apostles were not surprised at the unbelief which met their message, for they themselves had been hard to convince. When Jesus first appeared to them after He rose, “they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they beheld a spirit.” How would you feel if just a few days after you had buried some dear friend, he should suddenly walk in the door and begin a conversation with you? That’s what happened, and the apostles were scared just as any of us might be. They had never understood Christ’s statements about raising the dead, but now they were shocked into realization of the truth. See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself,” He said. “Handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as you see me having.” He was demonstrating that He was made of solid stuff, stuff they could feel with their hands. For further proof, he insisted on something to eat, which, when they gave it to Him, He ate before them (Luke 24:36-43).

Finally the apostles were convinced, but a great percentage of professing “Christians” are as yet unconvinced, having no belief in the reality of the resurrection, neither of Christ nor of themselves. The resurrection is thought of in terms of a continuing living spirit apart from and with no connection to a restored body.

The Scriptures pointedly state that the Christ that was raised was the Christ that was buried. Therefore that which was resurrected included the body. The apostles were told to examine Jesus’ body and satisfy themselves that it was the same person they had known before. Moreover, the Bible says that “in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead BODILY” (Col. 2:9). showing that He is still in the body, and as such is the first and only immortal person. When Jesus ascended to Heaven He did not discard the body, nor return to the same essence as before His incarnation. “For there is one God, one mediator

between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). Jesus, having become identified with the human race as a man in order that He might die a man’s death, is now eternally identified with the race of men, as an immortal man, “The firstborn from the dead,” and the “first-fruits of them that are asleep.”

To talk of a resurrection, but to mean something other than the resurrection of body, is nonsense, for the only resurrection of which the Bible speaks is the resurrection of the entire man. Jesus is NOW an eternal man, deathless and immortal.

The question, however, is not resolved merely by affirming the historical resurrection of Jesus. There remains the question of the resurrection of the race, the question of whether or not YOU will be raised up in the body.

Paul wrote, “Now 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” (1 Cor. 15:12-13). Note that Paul does not argue that if Christ has not been raised then men will not be raised. His argument is the other way around, that if there is not a resurrection of the dead, and then of course Christ could not have been raised. After all, Christ was a member of the human race, born of woman and subject to human death and decay. Paul went on to say, “We witnessed of God that he raised up Christ; whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead are not raised” (Verse 15).

The object of this chapter in the Corinthian letter was not to prove the resurrection of Christ; the church already believed that (Verses 14). The question was over the destiny of the Christian: would he be raised up or not? Here Paul states that the dead ARE to be raised, for if they are not to be raised, then Jesus was not raised.

Notice further, the inspired writing of Paul: “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” (1 Cor. 15:17-18). If no resurrection, then no life — they have perished.

Think what this means. It means that unless one accepts the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead, his faith is vain. All that he expects and hopes for in Christianity is worthless and useless. It means that one’s sins have not been forgiven him and the penalty of eternal death is still hanging over him (Rom. 6:23). It means that whatever you may think of Christianity, however much you try to live a good life and no matter how faithful you are to attend church, unless you accept the resurrection of the race, you are not a Christian, for if you reject the resurrection of the dead you also reject the resurrection of Jesus, and if you reject that you are rejecting the Gospel. Certainly one is not a Christian who rejects the gospel.

The belief in the literal resurrection of the dead is not a mere side-issue, nor speculative theology as suggested by some who wish to avoid a clash between believers and non-believers. It is fundamental to the faith, an essential element of the Gospel which saves. It was his faith in the resurrection of the dead that caused Abraham to be “reckoned” as

righteous. When he was commanded to offer up his Son, Isaac, as a testimony of his faith, the Scripture says he was willing to do so, “accounting that God is able to raise up even from the dead; from whence he did also in a figure receive him back ...” (Heb. 11:19). Paul uses this as an illustration of faith, saying that “Abraham believed God and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness,” and also “now it was not written for his sake alone that it was reckoned unto him, but for our sake also, unto whom it shall be reckoned, who believe on him that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up for our trespasses and was raised for our justification” (Rom. 4:3, 23-25). Abraham believed that if he had to slay his son, God would raise him from the dead, for God had promised that his blessing for the world would come through Isaac. Then Paul says that this is written for our sake, because we believe that Jesus was raised. Plainly this means that our faith must be in God raising the dead, and if we do not have such faith, it can hardly be said that we have the Christian faith at all. “Because if thou confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord and shall believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shall be saved” (Rom. 10:9). It is strange that many wish to quote only half of this text to prove that confession must be made. But the confession is worthless unless in the heart one believes in the resurrection.

Even as the whole creation groans and travails, awaiting the consummation of God’s plans, so “even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23). For the **ETERNAL PURPOSE OF GOD** is focused on this very thing, that we might become immortal men, like Jesus. “For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29). At the creation, God desired to have man in His own image. Man’s own rebellion through sin thwarted His purpose, but God still is working at it. In the final and eternal state, He will have a race of men “conformed to the image of His Son,” and the Son will then be the “firstborn among many brethren.” This can mean only one thing: that as Jesus was raised from the dead (the firstborn) we who believe in Him shall also be raised up. As He is the “firstborn” from the dead we too must be born from the dead in the day of resurrection. Thus we will be conformed to His image.

And what is this image? As we have already shown, it is the One who was bodily raised from Joseph’s tomb, and made immortal, and the One who is bodily alive today, who will come in the body again to receive the saints. Hence we read in Romans 8:17 that we are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” Even as Christ has inherited a glorious and immortal life, so shall we. “And we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2).

The book of Job, probably the oldest book of the Bible, gives the assurance of bodily resurrection. “And after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold...” (Job 19:25). Although Job longed for death as a way out of his extreme misery, he knew that in the “latter day” Christ, his Redeemer would bring again out of the dust of the earth his glorified body.

The question invariably arises as to whether the resurrected body is identical with the body that dies, and whether we will recognize one another. As to the latter, suffice it to

say that after Jesus came out of the tomb He recognized His friends, and His friends recognized Him. Certainly we can expect as much. As to the “kind” of body, Paul illustrates it by the seed that is sown, that dies, then comes up in a new body. So we need not worry about it being the same molecules and atoms. God is able, Paul says, to reproduce the body just as He is able to reproduce the seed. When you plant a grain of wheat, you can be sure that it isn’t going to come up as a stalk of corn nor as a watermelon vine, but will come forth and produce wheat. So we can be sure that the person placed in the grave will be the person and personality resurrected. The difference is that the new person will have a body that is incorruptible, powerful and glorious (1 Cor. 15:42-44). The curse of death and atrophy will be removed forever, so that we may be the eternal people of God, reflecting the very glory and beauty of God in the bodies He will fashion anew, “that it may be conformed to the body of His glory” (Phil 3:21).

All this is made possible only by the removal of sin. Jesus could come forth from the grave because He was totally without sin. Death is the penalty for sin, but since Jesus had no sin, death had no power over Him, though He voluntarily let them kill Him. But how shall we escape death, we whose record is charged with sin? The answer is in the act of Christ’s death, for He bore our sins and our penalty of death in His own death on the cross.

Hence the death and resurrection of Christ, our own death to sin and our hope of resurrection form the very core of Christian faith. The literal resurrection is just as much a part of Christian faith as is the literal death of the Savior. The two are intrinsically bound together as part of the same eternal purpose of the Creator. We should remember that Paul said that there is **ONE** hope. Hence we do not have a choice of a variety of future possibilities. Either we have the one, or we have none.

Our effort to pattern life after Christ is with the firm expectation that someday we actually will become like Him, pure, glorious, and immortal forever.

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