

# POP THEOLOGY SHUNS THE RESURRECTION

By

Curtis Dickinson

Something has happened in the popular theology of the day which distorts the entire purpose of God and the hope of His people. It is a widely held idea which denies the reality of death, and makes the resurrection meaningless and superfluous.

Death was first mentioned as the supreme penalty God decreed for man's disobedience (Gen. 2:17). It was next mentioned by Eve, when she admitted that it was the punishment to be imposed for disobeying God's command (Gen.3:3). The third time it was mentioned was by Satan, who claimed that it would never happen. "You shall not surely die." he said. (Gen. 3:4)

In the New Testament death is presented as a sad and tragic event which entered the world because of sin and is an enemy that is to be destroyed (Rom. 5:12, 1 Cor. 15:26, Rev.20:14). From Genesis to Revelation the Bible sets forth death as the loss of life, and Jesus is set forth as the conqueror of death, in that He was raised from the dead and in the last day will raise up all the dead and give them life.

However, the popular theology of Christendom is actually a systematized denial of this teaching, in that it denies that man really dies (in accord with Satan's original lie). Death is said to apply only to the body, with the real person continuing a conscious life, either in the joyous presence of God or in some form of suffering or torture. The common tradition holds that each person is immortal, in that he can live on forever, detached from the body.

The idea is expressed by a Bible college professor who wrote, "The reality of a conscious life beyond the grave is uniformly assumed and taught by the inspired Bible writers." He had to say that it was "assumed" because there is no direct statement in the Bible to support it.

If at death the Christian goes immediately to heaven, fully conscious, and is received by Jesus, as is commonly "assumed," we are confronted with some serious questions.

1. Why did Jesus say, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will receive you unto myself: that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3).

2. Why did Peter, by inspiration of God's Spirit, say "For David is not ascended into the heavens...he is both dead and buried," and his sepulcher is with us unto this day" (Acts 2:34, 29), As David was near death, he said to Solomon, "I go the way of all the earth," and scripture says that "David slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David" (1 Kings 2:10). According to peter he is still there, not in heaven.

3. Why would the apostle Paul, in consoling the Christians whose loved ones had died, fail to say one word about them being in heaven with Jesus, as is repeatedly said today? Instead, he said that they had “fallen asleep in Jesus,” and that “The Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:16-18).

4. Why did Paul write that Jesus brought life and immortality to light through His death and resurrection (1 Tim. 1:10)? If man already has immortality which allows him to continue as a live person after death (an oxymoron phrase), but which is invisible and unrelated to his dead body, how could this be brought to life by the resurrection of Jesus in a visible and tangible body?

5. Why would Paul say that if there is no resurrection, “Then those also that have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (1 Cor. 15:18)? If the dead are consciously alive in heaven, certainly they have not perished whether or not there is a resurrection. We must also recognize the fact that the New Testament verb describing the act of resurrecting the dead is the word for “to awake from sleep.” What sense can it make to “awake” those already fully conscious and rejoicing in the glories of heavenly bliss?

6. There are five accounts of resurrection in the New Testament. Lazarus (John 11:43), Jairus’ daughter (Luke 8:54-55), the widow’s son (Luke 7:15), Dorcas (Acts 9:40) and Eutychus (Acts 20:10). Why didn’t the record say that they were in heaven, or had gone home, or were more alive than ever, as is so often said of the dead? In every instance it was said of them that they were dead. We also wonder, if the popular idea is true that one is conscious in death, why none of them came back telling of awesome sights.

7. If a person continues in full consciousness after death, why did Jesus and Paul often refer to death as sleep? In sleep one is not conscious, although the body continues to function, the very opposite of what is held by those who teach consciousness after death. Death is referred to as sleep on no less than 67 occasions in the Bible, in 17 different books, with 20 of these references appearing in the New Testament.

8. Why the great emphasis throughout the New Testament on the resurrection at Christ’s return, if the real hope and glory takes place at death? If the dead are already enjoying glorious life, how could they be truly “raised from the dead” at the last day? Remember that in Paul’s explanation of resurrection in I Corinthians chapter 15, he uses the expression “raised from the dead” six times, and each time, in the original Greek, it means from “dead persons.” Death involves the whole person: the whole person dies and the whole person must be resurrected.

9. Concerning the resurrection Paul writes. “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; then they that are

Christ's at his coming" (1 Cor. 15:22-23). If saints who have died are alive in heaven, why does Paul say that it will be at Christ's coming when they shall all be made alive?

The all-important event of the day of Christ's coming to raise the dead, give immortality to the saints, and judge the world, has been replaced in popular theology by the moment of a person's death. When resurrection is mentioned, as in the creeds, it usually is to affirm the resurrection of the body, with the inference that the person is now a conscious entity, in a disembodied spirit, or soul, already in heaven. This idea of an "immortal soul" cannot be found in the Bible, but was brought into the church through Augustine and others who were avid students of Greek philosophy that originated with Plato. It became a fundamental part of Catholicism and was easily absorbed by Protestantism and into the early creeds.

If the doctrine is true, that one doesn't really die, but rather changes place of residence and begins enjoying the delights of heaven, being reunited with family and friends, as the tradition says, then who needs a resurrection? If death is a "release" from the prison of the body (a teaching of Plato, not of God), then one would not even desire a resurrection.

To think of the Christian hope as one's continuing survival after death is alien to the hope promised by Jesus and New Testament writers. The apostles penned their hope on the second coming and the resurrection which would then take place. It is at that time that immortality is to be conferred to those who are in Christ, and only to them. Popular theology has discarded the apostles' teaching in order to get the dead into heaven immediately, thus by-passing the resurrection.

Not only does this new slant shift the focus away from the foundation of the Christian faith and the future glorious victory at Christ's return, but it opens the door to a Gnosticism that is embraced by most pagan religions: the real person does not die but moves on to another plain, from where he can communicate with people, and perhaps be reincarnated. It is strangely interesting that so many preachers who denounce New Age religion, at the same time subscribe to one of its main tenants, the idea that people may live with all their faculties while totally detached from the body. **This pagan concept robs the Lord Jesus of His climactic victory over death and the grave, which is to take place in his triumphant return to raise the dead at the Last Day.**

Resurrection is not the survival of something that cannot die. It means the restoration to life of a person who has died. It is important for Christians to make clear what is meant by the resurrection, that the bereaved might be comforted rather than confused, and that the dying world might believe the truth of Christ, rather than a pagan myth.

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