

VICTORY DENIED

By

Curtis Dickinson

“O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:55-56).

This magnificent victory is being denied in most mainstream churches, in spite of the fact that it is celebrated worldwide on one Sunday out of the year. While holding lavish services in honor of Christ’s resurrection, most churches subtly deny it in other doctrines regarding life and death.

Christ’s claim that after his death he would rise again was unbelievable. Even the apostles couldn’t take it in, and when he appeared they at first thought they were seeing a ghost.

Once convinced that the resurrection was real they were changed men. Where they had been hiding behind locked doors “for fear of the Jews” they now went everywhere boldly to proclaim that Jesus was raised from the dead, and at the risk of imprisonment, defied the authorities who told them to keep quiet.

The resurrection was exciting news. It was revolutionary. When Paul went to Athens, the very center of academia, of philosophy, religion and learning, the focus of his message was that God had authenticated the authority of Jesus by raising him from the dead and thus guaranteed a day of judgment (Acts 17:31).

Wherever the disciples went, they shocked people awake and broke them loose from their pagan perspectives by the announcement that Jesus, who had died, had been raised from the dead, and that this resurrection was something that would happen to all; some raised to life and some to judgment. It overturned pagan concepts, and in the words of some. “Turned the world upside down.” It gave believers strength to endure horrible persecution for declaring their faith. They amazed their enemies by the way they met death without fear because they believed in the resurrection. Death would be real, but it would be only temporary, as Jesus would raise them up in the last day and bestow immortality to them, that they might have eternal life.

This was something entirely different from what the Roman world believed about the subject. The Greeks, under the influence of the champion of philosophers, Plato (427-347 BC) had given the world its concept of death. They taught that man had an immortal soul which did not – could not – die. Death only applied to the body, a shell or house for the “real person.” You didn’t die, you just moved out, and went to live in another place. However, death was still one of the biggest fears.

Resurrection, as taught by Jesus and the apostles, means that while death involves the whole person: it will be temporary, because in the last day Jesus will raise the dead back to life and give immortality to His followers.

This was demonstrated by Jesus himself. When they found his tomb empty, they were dumbfounded because they had not grasped the wondrous reality which He had declared; that after death he would come back to life. Then, as they stood around in awe and fear, he said, “Handle me, and see; for a spirit doesn’t have flesh and bones as you see I have”(Luke 24:39). He asked for food and ate it before their eyes. This was not a vision. He was not a spirit, but a whole person, in the body that had been nailed to the cross: *alive from the dead*.

The truth about death completely negated the pagan concept taught by Plato. Jesus was not alive because of some innate quality of immortality common to all human beings. He did not “survive” death; he actually died, then was restored to life by The Father. His resurrection did not prove that we do not die as man claims. It proved the opposite that he literally died, for if he had not been dead a resurrection would not have been necessary. His was not just a resurrection of the body, but a resurrection of himself. “I was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore” (Rev. 1:18).

This greatest of all events so charged the disciples that they quickly obeyed the great challenge Jesus had given: “Going into all the world, make disciples” (Matt.28:19). Within a matter of years the gospel was being preached, not only in the far-flung provinces of the Roman Empire as far as the British Isles, but even in Spain and India. Imagine, in a day when there were no trains, planes, or cars, no telephones, radios, TV, computers, and not even a coordinated postal system, when one either walked, rode a horse, or traveled by a slow-moving boat, the good news of Jesus spread like wild fire, and changed the world!

What happened to this enthusiasm and this “power of God unto salvation?” It all happened right in the church. Soon the people began to turn their responsibilities over to professionals, and as always there were opportunists among the professionals; men who were able to gain high positions and wield great influence in the church: such were Origen and Augustine, both avid fans of Platonic philosophy, and after conversion they brought their pagan notions right into the church. Origen not only believed in an immortal soul, but also taught that all mankind would eventually be saved. By the fourth century the doctrine of “immortal soul” had become the “orthodox” teaching. Remember, there were no printed Bibles, only parchment copies of parts of the Bible, and few could afford these, so new converts accepted what their bishops taught.

Instead of death being seen as an enemy as the Bible describes it (1 Cor. 15:26), it was said to be a friend that released the person to greater realms. The Resurrection victory was replaced by the Platonic doctrine of the immortal soul, and along with that victory went the thrill and the hope that had been the driving force of the church’s early successes.

Many are the miracles which demonstrated Jesus’ power over physical and material things. He could turn water into wine, create a feast for thousands out of two loaves and

five fish, wither the barren fig tree with a word, and calm the wind and waves with one command. He could give sight to the blind, restore withered limbs and heal the sick. So, raising up a dead body would be no more than any of these. But that's not what is meant by resurrection. In resurrection from the dead it is not only the body, but the spirit of life also that must be restored. It is the whole person that dies and the whole person is resurrected to life.

The answer to death is NOT that we are created with some kind of immortal quality that cannot die! This is the devil's lie, the lie he used to tempt Eve when he disputed God and said, "You will not surely die" (Gen. 3:4). Eve believed this lie and disobeyed God, then persuaded Adam to join her in disobedience.

This lie is still as persuasive as it was back there in the Garden. Only today Satan has a myriad of helpers; religious people of all kinds, people who have credentials from their various groups, and who are thought to hold great understanding of things religious. These people are held in high esteem and have the undivided attention of millions of listeners every week. And they keep repeating over and over that there is no such thing as death because everyone is immortal and cannot die, that only the body suffers death and the "real you" goes right on living.

This directly contradicts scripture which states that God "only has immortality" (1 Tim 6:16), and that the saints are to "put on immortality" in the day of resurrection. Paul even went so far as to write that if the dead are not to be raised "then neither has Christ been raised...then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (1 Cor. 15:16-18). That clearly denies the popular dogma that when one dies he goes on living somewhere else.

At funerals we often hear that the deceased is enjoying blissful life in heaven. Evangelists like to say that within five seconds after death sinners will be in torment in the fires of hell. Both teachings deny resurrection truth.

If there is no death, then Jesus was not truly raised from the dead (i.e., "from among dead persons" – Gk). If death is only half death, with the "real person" living somewhere else, the claim to have won victory over death by a resurrection is a false claim. The immortal soul idea is in conflict not only with scriptures which state that all who reject Christ will suffer the punishment of final and eternal death, but it is in conflict with the very heart of the gospel; that Jesus died and rose again. It denies Christ's glorious victory over death by his resurrection.

"But now has Christ been raised from the dead the first-fruits of them that are asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20). *Hallelujah!*

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