

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD



“Mary was standing without at the tomb weeping: so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; and she beholdeth two angels in white sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.” **John 20:12, 13**

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“He preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.” “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead some mocked” (Acts 17: 18, 32). “If there be no resurrection of the dead . . . then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain; . . . then is not Christ raised, and . . . ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished” (1 Cor. 15: 13-18). “All that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth” (John 5:28-29).

In our study of the resurrection of the dead, we find the word “resurrection” used 43 times in the New Testament, besides various other words of similar import. When we recognize that all the prominent creeds of Christendom declare faith in a resurrection as an integral doctrine of the hope of eternal life and of the strong language of the texts above quoted, whose inspiration is conceded by all Christians, it may seem strange that we should ask any Christian the question, Do you believe in the resurrection of the dead?

We believe the resurrection doctrine to be so very important in its connection with other doctrines of Scripture that we desire to call general attention to this subject and to invite an examination of our question in the light of facts and of Scripture; our

hope being that after a careful examination of the subject many more of God's people will come to believe—consistently, logically, Scripturally—in a resurrection.

FEW RESURRECTION SERMONS NOW

It is not difficult to ascertain the views of the clergy of all denominations on the subject of the resurrection of the dead; for, although that topic is rarely chosen for discourse, except sometimes on Easter Sunday, it is, nevertheless, on occasion attached, to funeral services and obituaries. We believe this subject so widely misunderstood, is then a subject that is profitable to study for those who desire to understand God's Words on this important doctrine of the Bible.

IS DEATH A REALITY?

Yes it is, however, many Christians have come to believe that death is not a reality; that people merely seem to die, and do not die; that they merely experience a change to a higher form of being.

Whoever holds such views cannot consistently believe in "the resurrection of the dead," because if no one is dead, how can there be a resurrection of the dead? Wherein would be the sense in speaking of a resurrection of the dead to life, if they already have life more

abundantly than before they seemingly died?

“CONSISTENCY, THOU ART A JEWEL”

(1) They tell us that the deceased is “far better off,” in that he has gotten free from the “fetters of the flesh,” and that now “his free spirit wings its flight to God, no longer hampered by the mortal dust.” They go into emotional excitement in describing the grandeur, liberty and blessedness of the one who has died, and who, by reason of getting rid of the body, has attained to life more abundant.

(2) In the same breath they quote the Scriptures referring to the resurrection and (wholly misconstruing these Scriptures) tell us that by and by, at Christ’s Second Coming, the same bodies of flesh that were buried will be reorganized. They tell us that then the spirit beings which, they say, left those bodies at death, will return to them, as their everlasting habitations. Then, inasmuch as the resurrection is Scripturally set forth to be the grand and glorious result and consummation of our salvation, they feel compelled to go into emotional excitement over their erroneous presentation of the resurrection, and to tell how glorious and grand will be the result.

They seem to overlook entirely the inconsistency

of these two propositions; and they expect that their hearers will be similarly inconsistent and illogical; and indeed, the majority of their hearers accept the inconsistency without difficulty; yea, many of them seem to think that the more inconsistent and unreasonable their belief may be, the more reason they have to congratulate themselves that they have a very strong faith.

SOME LOGICAL THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER

Before proceeding to the Scriptural teachings on the topic of the resurrection of the dead, consider the following story between two people. They were discussing the state of the dead, the one arguing that at the moment of death everyone went either to a heaven of bliss or to a hell of torment (see note), while the student of the Bible insisted that the Bible taught the dead were dead until the time for the awakening at the Second Coming of Christ.

The student said, "Now there was Adam, where do you suppose he went at the time of his death?"

The gentleman replied, "Adam did not do anything very heinous, and even after he was driven out of the Garden of Eden he seemed to long for fellowship with God; so, I presume he went to heaven when he died."

The student said, “But look here, Adam was the one who got all the rest of us in trouble by his disobedience. As St. Paul says, ‘By the disobedience of one, judgment came upon all men unto condemnation,’ and according to your view this means that Adam’s sin was the thing which started millions of the race on the road which will terminate in an eternity of torture; and yet Adam, the one who helped to send them there, is to go to heaven.”

The gentleman said, “That is so, isn’t it? I never thought of that before. Surely Adam could not go to heaven after that. My statement was incorrect; Adam must have gone to hell when he died.”

The student said, “But see what that involves you in. Adam merely ate some forbidden fruit, and all have done as bad things as that. So, if God sentenced Adam to such an awful eternity for such a little thing, what hope can the rest of us have?”

The gentleman answered this with, “That’s so, that’s so. My first answer was right, Adam surely went to heaven.”

The student replied, “If that is true then it involves you in a greater absurdity than before. Had Adam been obedient he would have dwelt forever in that perfect Paradise, the Garden of

Eden, but now he had disobeyed and must die, and in consequence of his sin he was to get something far better than he ever would have had by obedience.”

The friend in his confusion tried to correct himself again saying, “That couldn’t be; that would be inconsistent; Adam must have gone to hell—that’s the correct thought.”

Again, the student had his turn: “But see what this leads to. Thousands of years ago Adam sinned and died, while today men are passing into death who have had far more of the spirit of rebellion in their hearts than Adam ever had; and yet they will have thousands of years less of infernal agony than Adam, who committed such a little sin in comparison. Would that be justice?”

The gentleman said, “You’ve got me all confused. I don’t know where Adam’s is.”

How well this brings home to our hearts the fact that while the Truth is “clear as crystal,” the error is confusing and contradictory and opposes all logical thinking!

To understand the truth of this doctrine of the resurrection of the dead (and all doctrine) is to learn of the Divine purposes for the world of mankind as so generously given to us in the Scriptures.

Note: It appears that fewer and fewer Christians believe in the “hell of torment” and this is as it should be because our precious “God of Love” would not, could not torture anyone for eternity. (please request our tract “Hell is NOT a Place of Torment”).

THE SCRIPTURAL HOPE

With this preface to our subject we go to the Scriptures to learn from them what is meant by “the resurrection of the dead,” and in what manner and why the Scriptures speak of the resurrection as the hope, the only hope, the blessed hope, not only of the Church, who are to have part in the heavenly resurrection, but of the world in general, who are to have an opportunity to share in the resurrection of judgment, improperly translated “the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:29).

Whoever would believe the Scriptural doctrine of the resurrection must also believe the Scriptural doctrine respecting death—that death is death, the cessation of life. Then, and not until then, will he be able to understand the Apostle’s words in our text, “If there be no resurrection of the dead, ... then they which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.”

This statement is no exception to or different

from the teaching of the Scriptures elsewhere. Their unanimous testimony is that the dead are dead; that “in that very day their thoughts perish” (Psa. 146:4). Of the dead the Scriptures further declare, “His sons come to honor and he knoweth it not; they are brought low, but he perceiveth it not of them”; “for there is neither wisdom, nor knowledge, nor device in the grave whither thou goest” (Job 14:21; Eccl. 9:10).

SHALL WE BELIEVE GOD OR SATAN?

Here is a direct conflict between modern teachers and the inspired Word, the Scriptures claiming that the dead know not anything, the modern theologians claiming that they know everything. The Bible claims that the dead are really dead, and have really suffered according to the Divine penalty for sin pronounced against our race—“Dying thou shalt die.” The opposers take up with Satan’s delusive statement to Mother Eve, “Ye shall not surely die” (Gen. 3:4), and attempt to prove that the dead are not dead; that God’s penalty against sin did not go into effect, and that death, so far from being the sentence or curse upon our race, is a blessing, a step in a general process of evolution. The two theories are as far apart as the poles, and the two teachers of these two theories, as we have shown, are God, on the one hand, and Satan, a liar

from the beginning (John 8:44), on the other hand. Which shall we believe?

The entire Plan of Salvation is connected with this question. If death was not the penalty of sin, incurred through Adam, then “life and that more abundant” is not the reward and blessing of God secured through Christ by a resurrection. Satan’s proposition, which has been so widely accepted by Christians and which exercises so blinding an influence upon their minds, is the reverse, in every sense of the word. The Divine proposition that death is the curse or penalty of sin; that Christ died to release man from this sentence, and that the release comes by the resurrection of the dead, who otherwise would never have future life, as says the Apostle in our text. Satan’s theory declares death a blessing which brings the fullness of life, liberty and joy, and would make of the resurrection a curse.

No wonder that, blinded by this deception of the Adversary, the majority of the great theologians of Christendom—and rapidly their many followers—are leaving the doctrine of the Atonement, which declares that as by a man (Adam) came death, so also by a man (the man Christ Jesus) comes the resurrection of the dead; that as all in Adam die, even so all in Christ shall

be made alive (1 Cor. 15:21, 22).

MAN UNDER A STRONG DELUSION

We see that the leading lights of Christendom today repudiate both of the cardinal features of the Gospel, which the Apostle preached of old: “He preached Jesus and the resurrection”—Jesus as the Redeemer of mankind from sin and its curse—death—and the resurrection as the grand result of that redemptive work, by which the blessings secured by the Ransom-sacrifice will be made applicable to and available for whosoever wills to accept eternal life upon the Scriptural terms. We are reminded of our Lord’s own words respecting unbelief at the present time: He says, “When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find the faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8).

The testimony of our senses, like the testimony of God’s Word, is that death means the loss of life, and not an increase of life. Watch the dying one and note his weakening powers, mental and physical, until the spark of life becomes extinct. You have seen nothing go from him, except the gradual cessation of the pulse, and the breath of life. With this evidence you know that your friend, your loved one, is dead—alive no longer. When the spark of life has gone the corpse must be

buried; dust to dust, ashes to ashes. You note the similarity between the death of your friend and loved one and the death of the brute beast, and your senses can discern no difference between them; and the Scriptures declare, “As dieth the one, so dieth the other; they have all one [spirit of life] breath” (Eccl. 3:19).

MAN’S PRE-EMINENCE OVER BEAST

But with a longing for a future life, implanted in your nature by our Creator, you inquire, is there no hope—hath a man no pre-eminence above a beast? The Scriptures answer that, physically speaking, man “hath no pre-eminence above a beast,” but they assure us that the Creator has made a provision for man that He did not make for the beast, viz., everlasting life; and that this provision for man’s everlasting life was made by God in the beginning—not by implanting a deathless quality in man’s constitution, but by providing in the life-sustaining trees of the Garden of Eden, the means of continuing his life everlastingly; nevertheless, this provision was conditional, dependent upon man’s obedience to his Creator.

The Scriptures point out that man’s disobedience brought upon him the sentence of death, and that the execution of that sentence was effected

by driving him out of the Garden, away from the life-sustaining fruit of its trees. Thus driven out, the sentence, “Dying, thou shalt die,” took effect upon Father Adam gradually, and he lived 930 years; nearly to the end of the first thousand-year day. At this time (2018) the life expectancy of males is 76 years and female 81 years.

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD

The Scriptures answer our inquiries respecting the dead. While assuring us of the justice of the Divine sentence of death, they nevertheless declare that our Creator is a God of mercy and of pity. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

It was in harmony with this Divine sympathy that, in due time, God sent His only begotten Son into the world, for our redemption—to give for us the Ransom-price, and ultimately to recover all who will accept of Divine mercy, from all the consequences of the fall by a resurrection from the dead. “Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, 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). But Divine Love could not make void Divine Justice; it was necessary that God should be just, if He would be the justifier of them that believe in Jesus; hence the demands of Justice—the penalty for sin—must be paid by our Redeemer, before the work of release and restitution could begin. “Repent ye, therefore, and turn,-unto the blotting out of your sins; to the end that in that case, there may come seasons of refreshing from the face of the Lord, And he may send forth him who had been fore-appointed for you-Christ Jesus” (Rotherham). Yes, Luke 19:10 states that Jesus came to seek and save that which was lost: life everlasting on the perfected earth! “Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us out of the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father” (Rotherham).

Just as Jesus’ death ransoms man from the sentence of death, so His resurrection from death became the assurance of the justification of all who accept and obey Him. The Heavenly Father gave evidence that the Ransom-price was entirely satisfactory; and our Lord, who was thus obedient to the Father, was raised from the dead and, as the Father’s Agent and Representative, will soon begin the work of blessing the entire world redeemed by His precious blood.

Many of the special features of this great work of restitution or justification are clearly pointed out by the sacred writers. Our Lord speaks of the awakening of all from death in that day, saying, "There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" (Acts 24:15). They tell us that the knowledge of the Lord shall be made to fill the whole earth as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2:14), showing that great enlightening and educational influences will be set to work; that the world will be ruled with a rod of iron (Rev. 2:27), with unbending justice, from the power of which none can escape; that a grand highway of holiness [a public thoroughfare] shall be cast up, and that the redeemed of the Lord shall walk thereon (Isa. 35:8, 9; 40:3; 62:10), showing a grand reversal of public sentiment in favor of righteousness, a glorious revival of religion that shall sweep over the whole world. "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

THE FIRST RESURRECTION

As stated in John 5:28, 29 there is a first, a chief or special resurrection, "the resurrection of life" and a general one "the resurrection of judgment" later. The first or superior resurrection includes the resurrection of our Lord Jesus and of the elect "Church which is His Body"—no more, no less.

Blessed and holy are they that have part in the First Resurrection; on such the Second Death hath no power; but they shall be kings and priests unto God and shall reign over the earth—the Messianic Kingdom class. Those who share in this First Resurrection are “changed” from the human to the Divine nature—the highest of the spirit natures; not human, not flesh and blood, for “flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.” Some of the characteristics of their change are indicated by the Apostle as a change from weakness to power; from dishonor to glory, from corruption to incorruption, from a natural [human] body to a spirit body.

The understanding of this change of nature is given in 1 Cor. 15: 42-54. It is our understanding that the work of the first resurrection is now completed, and with that understanding we move our thoughts to the general one “the resurrection of judgment” for the world of mankind.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE WORLD

And, likewise the world of mankind, even though they know not of the Lord as yet, are spoken of as being “asleep in Jesus,” because, as the whole world was under condemnation of death through Adam, and that without knowledge or volition on their part, at the time of the sentence, for they

were then in the loins of their father, Adam, so now, since Jesus laid down His life a Ransom for all, and because they all shall be awakened from death, therefore it is proper for all those who are aware of the Divine provision for the awakening, by faith to speak of the interim figuratively as a sleep. “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him” (1 Thes. 4:14).

The world of mankind “fell asleep” in death, to await the Lord’s Day—the Day of Christ, the Millennial Day. This thought runs through the Old Testament as well—from the time that God first preached to Abraham the Gospel of a resurrection. The expression, “He slept with his fathers,” is very common in the Old Testament. But Job puts the matter in very forcible language, saying, “Oh that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret until thy wrath be [over] past!” The present dying time is the time of God’s wrath—the curse of death being upon all, because of the original transgression. However, in due time the curse will be lifted and a blessing will come through the Redeemer to all the families of the earth; and so Job continues, “All the days of my appointed time will I wait, until my change come; [then] thou shalt call (John 5:25) and I will answer

thee; thou shalt have a desire unto the work of thine hands” (Job 14:14, 15). And we of the New Testament times read our Lord’s response, “all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God [calling them to awake and come to a full knowledge of God and to a full opportunity of everlasting life]”—John 5:25, 28.

The Apostle exhorts us to trust and hope in the resurrection as respects all our dear friends who go down into the prison-house of death, and not merely as respects those who were sanctified in Christ Jesus, which would include, as a rule, only a small proportion of those for whom we would be inclined to sorrow. He says, “I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep [all our sleeping friends], that ye sorrow not, even as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died [a Ransom for all] and rose again [that He might be Lord and Life-giver to all], even so [let us believe as truly that] them also which sleep in Jesus [all whom He purchases with His precious blood] will God bring by Him [from the prison-house of death]” (1 Thes. 4:13, 14).

WORLDS RESURRECTION GRADUAL

God does not propose to give eternal life through Christ to any others than those who earnestly desire it, and who are in heart sympathy with the

principles of righteousness which must always be the Law of the Divine Government. Hence when the world is awakened from the sleep of death, it will not signify resurrection, but much less; for resurrection, in its full, complete, Scriptural sense, signifies a complete raising up, out of sin and out of death, to perfection of being, perfection of life.

The first work of Christ and the Church in the world, for those who have gone down into the prison-house of death will be their awakening to physical conditions similar to those in which they died. The surrounding conditions of society will then be greatly improved; knowledge will have taken the place of ignorance, and the reign of righteousness with the law of love will have superseded the rule of sin under the law of selfishness; and Satan will be bound, that he shall deceive the nations no more for the thousand years (Rev. 20:3). Under the favorable conditions of that Mediatorial Kingdom, all mankind will be required to make progress in the knowledge of the Lord and in the bringing of their own hearts and lives into accord with His law of Love. Whosoever then will make no effort in the right direction will be cut off from life, in the Second Death, after one hundred years of trial! (Isa. 65:20). It is evident that making progress in harmony with the laws of the

Kingdom is the honorable thing to do.

The world's resurrection will be a gradual work of four steps; (1) instruction in righteousness, (2) a time of testing of the progress in living righteously, (3) receiving correction in that which we have learned, (4) receiving the righteous sentence: death everlasting or life everlasting. Those that are worthy of life everlasting, will receive the blessed conditions which God has promised to prevail when there shall be no more sighing, no more dying, no more crying, because there will be no more sin and none of the penalties for sin, for all the former things shall have passed away (Rev. 21:4).

DEATH SPOKEN OF AS SLEEP

The condition of the dead, up to the time when the resurrection work begins, is one of total unconsciousness: "There is neither wisdom, nor knowledge, nor device in the grave whither thou goest"; "His sons come to honor and he knoweth it not; they are brought low, but he perceiveth it not of them." Of each of the Patriarchs of the past it is written, "He slept with his fathers"; "He fell asleep." And so also in the New Testament we have a similar record: "Stephen fell asleep." St. Paul speaks of those who saw the Lord after His resurrection and says, "He was seen of above 500 brethren at once, of whom the greater part

remain unto this present time, but some are fallen asleep.” Again he speaks of some which are “fallen asleep in Christ,” here distinguishing between the Church, who are in Christ,* as members of His Body, and the world in general, who “sleep in Jesus” (Eccl. 9:10; Job 14:21; 1 Kings 2:10; 11:43; Acts 7:60; 1 Cor. 15:6, 18; 1 Thes. 4:14).

*Christ is the title of our Lord as the New Creature, and of His office; while Jesus is the name of the Redeemer, through whose sacrifice comes to all men as an opportunity to share in a resurrection of the dead.

GOD’S OMNIPOTENCE AND WISDOM

The bodies in which the world will be awakened will be human [flesh and blood] much the same as the body which died, though not the same atoms of matter; for in the hands of our Creator one atom of dust is as good as another in this restitution work. St. Paul says, “Thou sowest not that body which shall be” (1 Cor. 15:37). The bodies of the world, as they shall be when awakened, will be complete new bodies, in the sense that they will be different atoms of matter; but they will be old bodies, in the sense that they will be flesh and blood the same as the body which died and returned to dust. We cannot wonder that the worldly

mind, which knows not God and knows not of His power, is troubled with the thought of resurrection. It will be a most stupendous work, more wonderful by far than man's original creation; it will thus be to mankind, and to angels also, the grandest exhibition ever given of Divine Omnipotence.


He who formed man in the beginning, in His own image, has the power not only to form him again of the dust of the ground, and to re-ignite the spark of life, but yet more than in these will He exhibit both His Supreme Power and His Infinite Wisdom in the restoration to each being of a brain like his present one, having recorded therein the events and circumstances which have transpired in the present life. None but an Infinite Being could claim the power thus to reproduce the very thoughts of the billions of mankind. He of whom it is said that He knows the very hairs of our heads and their number, and that not a sparrow can fall to the ground without His notice—only He could do so great and wonderful a thing; and only as we have learned to have confidence in Him through the revelation of His Word could we exercise faith in such a stupendous miracle as He has promised shall be performed. Isa. 46:10

“Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.”

We do not expect that the world of mankind will all be awakened simultaneously, but rather that the great work of the Messianic Kingdom will begin with those who have not gone down to the tomb, but who are nevertheless in death, in the sense that they are not alive in the complete, full measure of freedom from the power of death. When the work of restitution shall have progressed to some extent with these, we may expect that some of those who have previously fallen asleep in death will be awakened, and share in the blessings of that glorious Day. Later, others, and still others, will arise, until eventually it will be true that, in that Day, the Day of Christ, “all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God”—shall obey the mandate, “Come forth”—and shall be brought to a knowledge of the goodness and love and mercy of God; and, if they will, ultimately to the full perfection of human nature. During this same length of time the earth [mankind’s place of residence] is being fitted and prepared as a Paradise of God for His restored family.

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