

The Resurrection of the Just and the Unjust

The doctrine of the resurrection electrified the early church. In the New Testament there are few doctrines on which more stress is laid, yet there are few doctrines in the churches today which are treated with more neglect. Why? Most traditional creeds in the Christian churches refer to the "resurrection of the body"—the same body we have in this life. Have you ever pondered what that means?

One Evangelical minister attempted to explain the "resurrection of the body." He said, that it will consist of a regathering and revivifying of all the bones, sinews, flesh, skin, etc., that ever constituted a human body, regardless of how these parts had been disposed—no matter if parts had been destroyed by fire or accident or eaten by fishes or beasts of prey; or if they had rotted in the ground and been absorbed as nutrients into various fruits, vegetables, grass, etc., and thus been over and over again transformed. He pictured the air filled with hands, arms, feet, fingers, bones, skins, sinews, etc., of the billions who have lived and died, seeking the other parts of their bodies; and that then the souls would come from heaven and hell and be imprisoned in those resurrected bodies. How absurd! And yet, how else could one explain the "resurrection of the same body? No wonder very little mention is made of the resurrection in today's pulpit. Hear the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:35-37:

But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come? And that which thou sowest, *thou sowest not that body that shall be*, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But *God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him*, and to every seed his own body.

The most complete discussion of the resurrection is given in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 where Paul unfolds the beautiful details of this doctrine:

20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. 21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. 24 Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. 25 For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death (1 Cor. 15:20-26).

Verse 20 shows Jesus was the first to be raised from the dead. But there would be afterfruits—all mankind. Verses 21 and 22 identify the afterfruits. Just as all mankind died because of Adam's sin, so all will be made alive because of Jesus' death—as a "ransom for all" (1 Tim. 3:6).

Two Resurrections

Verse 23 shows that "all" mankind, for whom Jesus died, will be divided into two groups—Christ the firstfruits, followed by "they that are Christ's at his parousia" (Greek for presence). Christ the firstfruits refers to the Body of Christ, his Church. Jesus was the firstfruits from the dead. But the Body of Christ will be the firstfruits of the world for whom Jesus died. They are called the "firstborn" in Hebrews 12:23. These Christians are raised at Christ's return (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).

Christ will be present for a thousand years (2 Peter 3:7-12). "They that are Christ's at his presence" in 1 Corinthians 15:23 clearly shows the afterfruits or remainder of mankind will be raised during Christ's thousand-year kingdom (Rev. 20:1-6). This is confirmed by verses 24-27 of 1 Corinthians 15 which show that the resurrection work of verse 23 occurs during the Kingdom of Christ.

Thus, there are two resurrections: first the church and second the remainder of mankind. No wonder Paul spoke of the "resurrection of the just and the unjust" in Acts 24:15. And this is just what Jesus tells us in John 5:28, 29.

Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in the which all that are in their graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth; they that have done *good* to a resurrection of life and they that have done *evil* unto the resurrection of judgment (RSV).

Note, all will be raised from the dead—first, "they that have done good." This refers to the true Church. During Christ's return they will be raised to spiritual life and united with their heavenly Lord. Then will follow the resurrection of the "evil class," all the remainder of men. They will come forth to a "resurrection of judgment." The Greek word in the text is *krisis* and it actually denotes "a crucial testing time." This Greek word is the source of our English word "crisis." And it has the same meaning. A doctor might say, "The patient will reach his crisis tomorrow morning." This does not mean that the patient will die tomorrow morning. Rather, the crisis of an illness is that period when the patient will take a turn for the better or for the worse.

The "crisis" or trial time for the Church is in this present life, but the "crisis" or trial time of the remainder of mankind will be at the resurrection in the Kingdom. Billions of mankind before and after Jesus' earthly ministry died without receiving the light of Jesus. Yet John 1:9 states that Jesus is the light that "lighteth every man that cometh into the world" A further Scriptural confirmation that, for most, truth enlightenment will require an awakening from the dead.

Resurrection of the Unjust—When?

Both Jesus in John 5 and the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 taught the resurrection of the unjust occurs during the 1,000 year Kingdom of Christ when they will be on trial for eternal life. Yet Revelation 20:4, 5 seems to place it after the thousand years.

4...they [the Church] came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 *The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.* 6 Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first

resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. Revelation 20:4-6

Verses 4 and 6 clearly teach that the Church reigns with Christ in his 1,000 year Kingdom. Therefore, the Church must be resurrected at the beginning of the 1,000 years and verse 6 plainly states the Church's resurrection is the "first resurrection." Yet verse 5 places the raising of "the rest of the dead" (the "unjust") after the thousand years are completed. It then calls the raising of the unjust "the first resurrection." This is a contradiction to verse 6 which identifies the raising of the Church as "the first resurrection."

Notice in verse 5 we italicized, "the rest of the dead did not come alive until the thousand years were completed." Why? These words do not appear in the earliest manuscripts that contain these verses.¹ By eliminating these spurious words, verses 4-6 harmonize. Now verses 4 and 5 agree with verse 6—the first resurrection applies to the Church. Because of their theology, the translators have been less than objective on 1 John 5:7-8 and Revelation 20:5. Finally the translators have, in the last couple of decades, admitted that parts of 1 John 5:7-8 are spurious. Hopefully they will also concede that the first part of Revelation 20:5 is spurious. Thank the Lord there are reference books that enable us to prove it for ourselves.

Old Testament

The prophet Daniel wrote "many who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake"(12:3). In Romans 5:15-19 "many" is used interchangeably with "all" when referring to those who benefit from Jesus' death. Daniel then divides the "many" into two classes. Some awake to "everlasting life" and "some to shame and everlasting contempt." Some translations say "age-lasting" or "age-abiding" "life" or "contempt." The Hebrew word translated everlasting or age-lasting is *olam*. *Olam* does not mean eternal or everlasting. It means "for the duration." The context or other scriptures will define the length of that duration. Some translators seem to get a satisfaction by rendering *olam* as everlasting or perpetual when referring to the punishment on the non-elect.

The following scriptures prove *olam* does not mean perpetual or everlasting. In Exodus 29:9 the Aaronic Priesthood would be *olam*, and was incorrectly translated *perpetual*. Hebrews 7:12 shows the Aaronic Priesthood ended in Paul's Day. It was replaced by the Melchisedec order. In Jeremiah 25:9, 12, Nebuchadnezzar would make the land of Judah a "*perpetual (olam)* desolation." Incorrect translation! Verse 11 states that the desolation would be 70 years.

Recall John 5:28, 29. The evil are raised to a resurrection by "krisis" or trial. This trial includes the 1,000 years, *plus* the "little season" that follows. Some will pass their trial favorably during the 1,000 years and enjoy what Daniel (12:3) calls age-lasting life. But only those who pass the test of the "little season" will receive everlasting life. Certainly there will be nefarious persons among the evil who are raised to their trial time (John 5:29). They will endure age-lasting shame as they are confronted by those they had harmed. Whether they finally obtain eternal life is problematic.

Remember 1 Corinthians 15? At death "you do not sow the [same] body which is to be, but bare grain, [our ego or personality] But God gives it a body just as He wished." (1 Cor. 15:37, 38, 40 NAS)

Jesus spoke of the resurrection of the "good" and the "evil". Paul called it the resurrection of the just and the unjust. The Revelator identified the raising of the Church as the first resurrection, thus implying a second resurrection. In the first resurrection, the "good" or "just" receive a spiritual or celestial body that is immortal (1Cor. 15:38, 40, 53, 54). In the second resurrection, the "evil" or "unjust" receive an earthly or terrestrial body (1 Cor. 15:38, 40). This life is age-lasting. If they have the faith and obedience to pass their "krisis" or trial, they will have eternal life (Rev. 20:17).

Endnotes

1. These words are missing in the earliest Greek manuscripts—Codex Sinaitic and Codex Alexandrine. (The Codex Vatican #1209 does not contain the Book of Revelation.) These words are also missing in the earliest Syriac and Aramaic manuscripts.