

## The Mystery of the Resurrection

*“Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die”*  
(1 Corinthians 15:36)

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### INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 15 has been called the resurrection chapter of the New Testament. Paul devotes this entire chapter to a treatment of the resurrection of the dead. It appears from Verse 12 that some at Corinth denied the general resurrection, while at the same time believing in the resurrection of Christ from the dead. There may have been several reasons for this belief based upon Grecian philosophy which permeated the society at Corinth. But, whatever the reason, Paul refuted this false belief by reasoning that the fact of the resurrection of Christ implies the general resurrection.

The assertion of some in Corinth “that there is no resurrection of the dead” (Verse 13) was a major doctrinal deviation from the Gospel because it took the very heart out of the Gospel. Nothing receives greater attention in the early Gospel sermons than the resurrection of the body of Christ. Yet, this erroneous position about the resurrection led to the logical conclusion that Jesus Himself could not have been raised from the dead, as the Scriptures said He would, and many reliable witnesses testified that He was.

Paul clearly teaches that Christ was the firstfruits of the resurrection and that the resurrection of the dead will take place when Christ comes again to deliver up the kingdom to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:23-28). He also reveals some things concerning the general resurrection: how it will take place, what type of body we will have, and what will happen to those who are alive when Christ comes again. Then he says in Verse 51, “Behold, I shew you a mystery.” The word “mystery” comes from the Greek word *musterion*, which was originally used to describe a scheme, a strategy, or a plan yet to be executed, but not yet revealed. This same word is used in Ephesians 5:32 to refer to the plan of God to bring salvation to mankind in Christ and His church. So, it simply means something not revealed or kept secret until the proper time of revelation. Thus, Paul is now revealing truths concerning the resurrection at this time.

The resurrection is one of the fundamental principles of Christianity. Certainly, the subject of the mystery of the resurrection is one that is of interest to all classes of people. Whether you are a sinner or a saint, lost or saved, you should be concerned with what will happen following your death.

### DEFINING THE RESURRECTION

In order to understand this subject we must define the word “resurrection.” The Greek word which is usually translated “resurrection” in the King James Version (in all but two passages in the New Testament) is *anastasis*. It is translated “resurrection” thirty-nine times; “rising again” one time; and with the preposition *ek* it is translated “raised to life again” one time and “that should rise”

one time. The Greek word *egesis* is translated “resurrection” one time in Matthew 27:53.

The root meaning of *anastasis* according to Young is, “A standing or rising up” (Young, p. 812) It is a compound Greek word made up of the preposition *ana* which means “up” and *histemi* which means “to cause to stand” (Vine, p. 531). Bagster defines it as, “a raising up or rising up; resurrection” (Bagster, p. 31). Thayer defines it, “1. a raising up, rising; 2. a rising from the dead - a. that of Christ; b. that of all men” (Thayer, p. 41-42).

Death simply means “separation” and there are several types of death in the Bible: (1) Physical death - separation of body and spirit, James 2:26; (2) Spiritual death - separation of our spirit from God, Isaiah 59:2; (3) Dead *in sin* - separated from righteousness, Ephesians 2:1; (4) Dead *to sin* - separated from sin, Romans 6:10-11; (5) Second death - eternal separation from God, Revelation 20:14.

Spiritual death, being dead in sin, and the second death can all be overcome by the blood of Christ coupled with our obedience to the Gospel unto death (Revelation 2:10). Being dead to sin is brought about by our continued obedience to righteousness (Romans 6:16-18). That leaves only one kind of death that must be overcome - physical death - and it has been overcome by the power of God in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Thus, we understand the term resurrection refers to the rising again, or the standing again, of the physical body. In other words, the resurrection is a reuniting of the body with the spirit which animates it and makes it alive. It is a nullifying of physical death. This is what Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians 15 in detail about the general resurrection or the reuniting of the spirit with the body, which will take place at the end of time. This view is borne out by the use of the pronoun “it” which Paul used in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 as he explained the resurrection of the dead. What else could “it” refer to but the physical body which is buried? We know “it” is not the spirit of man, because the spirit returns to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Thus, the term resurrection must refer to the reuniting of the body with the spirit.

## **PROOF OF THE RESURRECTION**

It is interesting to note that the word “resurrection” does not appear in the Old Testament, but there are several passages in the Old Testament, which, nevertheless, teach us in typical form some facts concerning the resurrection of the dead.

### **Types Of The Resurrection**

Isaac was in a type resurrected, when he was spared by God as Abraham was about to offer him as a burnt sacrifice. Genesis 22:13, “And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.” Paul wrote in Hebrews 11:17-19, “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting

that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.”

Jonah was also in a type resurrected when he was delivered from the belly of the whale. Jonah 2:10, “And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.” Jonah's being in the belly of the whale and then cast upon dry land was a type or figure of the time Jesus would be in the tomb and then resurrected from the dead, as Jesus said in Matthew 12:40, “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

### **Prophecies Of The Resurrection**

There are also several prophecies in the O.T. which offer proof of a resurrection to come, such as those found in Isaiah 26:19, Daniel 12:2-3, Hosea 13:14. Other prophecies, spoken by Isaiah and Daniel, came to pass exactly as foretold. For instance, the prophecy concerning Babylon in Isaiah 13-14 came to pass upon them as Isaiah had foretold. The prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem (Daniel 9:27) was echoed by Jesus (Matthew 24:15) and came to pass in 70 A.D. as history records. If we can accept the word of these prophets in these fulfilled prophecies, then we should also be able to accept these prophecies concerning the resurrection of the dead which is yet to happen.

### **Demonstrations Of The Resurrection**

There are also indisputable examples in the Old and New Testaments which show that God has the power to raise the dead and will do so according to His will and might.

Elisha raised the dead son of the Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4). 2 Kings 13:21 is another example when a dead person simply touched the bones of Elisha and was resurrected.

Jesus raised the widow of Nain's son by saying, “Young man, I say unto thee, Arise” (Luke 7:14) and he sat up and began to speak.

Jesus raised Lazarus, a man who had been dead for four days, by His command, “Lazarus, come forth” (John 11:43-44) and he came forth walking from the grave.

In Acts 9, we find the account where Peter raised Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:40). These are just some of the demonstrations of those who were raised from the dead. So, we can see the proof of the resurrection by the evidence of types, prophecies and demonstrations.

### **WILL THE BODY BE RAISED FROM THE DEAD?**

It is the body that dies or is separated from the spirit which animates it. James 2:26 says, “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” Matthew 10:28 shows the distinction which exists between the body and the soul (spirit) as well. Jesus said, “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

It is the body which is buried. When John the baptist was beheaded by Herod, we read in Matthew 14:12, "And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus." In the case of the body of Jesus we read in Matthew 27:59-60 that, "And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed." Clearly it is the body which dies (not the spirit or soul) and it is the body which is buried (not the spirit or soul) because it returns unto God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

Therefore, we must conclude that the body is that which is raised or resurrected. Certainly, in the case of the demonstrations of resurrection found in the Old and New Testaments, it was the body which is described as being raised, sitting up, standing up, walking or speaking again. Therefore, it must be a return of the spirit into the body which brings about the resurrection.

There are several Bible statements which we should observe:

The body of Christ arose. This is what Peter declared, by implication in Acts 2:27, "Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." The word "hell" here is from "hades" which simply means the unseen realm of disembodied spirits. The spirit of Christ was in the paradise compartment of hades, while His body was in the tomb of Joseph. Further, the latter statement that He would not "see corruption" must be in reference to the body of Christ, not His spirit. If His body were allowed to remain in the grave, then it would have seen corruption or decay, but it did not, for His spirit was brought back into it.

We know this is true, due to the fact that the women who had prepared spices for the body of Jesus sought Him in the tomb on the first day of the week, Luke records, "And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus" (Luke 24:3). We also know that it was the same body which had been crucified because after His resurrection He told Thomas, "...Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing" (John 20:27).

Of course, this does not mean that we shall have fleshly bodies in eternity, but that our physical bodies shall be transformed or changed into spiritual bodies in the last day. This is further proof of the resurrection of the body. There are several passages which teach this truth, among them are: Philippians 3:20-21, Romans 8:23, 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, and 1 Corinthians 15:50,53.

Some raise what they think are insurmountable difficulties with the bodily resurrection by pointing out that some bodies have been destroyed in fires and other tragedies, devoured, or cremated. However, all of these are simply quicker ways of the body returning to the dust from which it came. God, who created the heavens and earth and all things therein and who created man from the dust and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, is certainly able to resurrect all men from the dead, no matter what the condition of the body is on judgment day.

### **THE UNIVERSAL NATURE OF THE RESURRECTION**

The universal nature of the resurrection, of both the righteous and unrighteous, is a truth which seems difficult for some men to grasp. It is especially hard for those of the humanist persuasion,

because they like to think that they will not be answerable for anything after death. However, the resurrection of all men is just as broad as all men's appointment with death (Hebrews 9:27).

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:22, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." In this context, it is clear that Paul refers to the universal consequence of Adam's sin, which is physical death. Therefore, "in Adam" refers to the universal consequence of death. However, that must mean, that "in Christ" refers to the universal consequence that all men will be resurrected from the dead, as a consequence of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Thus, all men whether sinners or saints, will be raised from the dead. There are several other passages which support this:

The resurrection of the dead: will be composed of the just and unjust. In Acts 24:15, Paul speaking to Felix said, "And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust."

All in the graves shall come forth, as Jesus said in John 5:28-29, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves 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 damnation."

Death will be destroyed. 1 Corinthians 15:26, "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." However, if there were one dead person in the grave at the coming of Christ, then death would not be completely destroyed.

### **ONE TRANSACTION WILL TAKE PLACE AT THE RESURRECTION**

The resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteous will take place in one hour of time (John 5:28). There will not be a gap of one thousand years between the resurrection of the righteous and unrighteous as the false doctrine of pre-millennialism teaches.

However, there will be a separation following the general resurrection. Jesus said in Matthew 25:31-33, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left."

In John's vision of the judgment, he wrote in Revelation 20:11-12, "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works."

Paul set forth, in detail, the order of events which will take place on the judgment day in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17. He wrote, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which

are asleep. For 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 which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

### **HOW WILL WE BE RAISED?**

Our resurrection from the dead will not be according to the power of nature or natural law. This seems to be the point which Job is making in Job 14:7-13 as he used the tree to illustrate the truth that a tree which has been cut down can still produce spouts and grow, given time and water. But, man when he is cut down (dies) cannot live again except through the miraculous power of God to resurrect him from the dead.

This agrees with what Paul said directly in 1 Corinthians 6:14, “And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power.”

### **WHEN WILL THE GENERAL RESURRECTION TAKE PLACE?**

When Christ comes again. 1 Corinthians 15:23-26, “But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. 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. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”

At the last day. Martha understood this truth and declared it to Jesus when He told her that Lazarus would rise again. She said, “...I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (John 11:24). Further the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

### **CONCLUSION**

All men will take part in the general resurrection, whether they want to or not. All will be raised to stand before Christ in the day of judgment. Our rewards will await us there. The righteous will be raised unto eternal life, while the unrighteous will be raised unto eternal damnation. The resurrection morning will be a happy day of reunion and joy for those who have done good and are in Christ, and a day of sorrow and suffering for those who have done evil.

Let us, therefore, strive to grow ever more faithful and fruitful in our labors for the Master, so that we might receive a “better resurrection” (Hebrews 11:35).

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