

# Resurrection

The only hope beyond the grave

This short paper is written in the hope that it will be used by the gracious Holy Spirit for the enlightenment of many good Christian people who have been misled and misinformed with regard to this all important subject, namely, resurrection. Most of what we know on the subject has been handed down to us, and to a great measure it is a subject which has been little spoken about and avoided by many preachers and teachers. Everything we have to say will be firmly based on the word of God, not on what we think or have been told, and any quotations from others have been chosen because of their scriptural content.

Men of God of all ages have expressed their conviction that the resurrection is emptied of meaning, if the dead are existing in a state of conscious bliss, as for example Justin Martyr (A.D. 150) who wrote:

"If you fall in with those who are called Christians who confess not this truth (namely resurrection) but dare to blaspheme the God of Abraham and Issac and Jacob in that they say there is no resurrection of the dead, but that immediately when they die their souls are received up into heaven, avoid them and esteem them not Christians".

We may not feel called upon to question the Christianity of those believers who thus believe, but we do see that Justin Martyr puts his finger upon the danger incipient in the doctrine "*sudden death, sudden glory*".

Much of the problem regarding the subject stems from attributing teaching which originated with the Greek philosopher Plato and treating it as though it were scriptural truth. Many Christians may never have heard of Plato, but heard of him or not he is responsible for much of what is believed and taught concerning death and the afterlife. Many years ago in a pamphlet written by Rev. H. A. Barnes entitled "*The Platonic Tradition*" he wrote these words.

"At an early period in the Christian church it became fashionable to believe that there was much similarity between the teaching of Plato and that of Christianity, until it actually came to pass that the authority of the heathen

philosopher was recognized almost as if he had been a teacher of the true religion" (Kalamos p.625)

Dr. E. Petavel made this comment,

"The rising tide of Platonic theory was made to triumph in the Christian Church by the false Clementines, Tertullian, Minusclus Felix, Cyprian, Jerome, and especially by St. Augustine, but the primitive teaching was maintained here and there" (The problem of immortality p.242). Thus we are left with an unhealthy mixture of truth mingled with error.

How sad that the intellectual thoughts of a heathen philosopher should be held on a par with the Word of God. Take for instance the phrase "*The soul is immortal*", no sentence like this is found in the bible. Out of the more than 700 times the word "*nephesh*" Heb. "*soul*" appears in the O.T. scriptures it is never prefixed by the words, *never dying*, *eternal* or *immortal*. So where did the idea come from? In one word "Plato".

Professor Dr. J. Agar Beet wrote;

"His arguments (Plato's) move us to pity. For they are the painful efforts of a good man straining his eyes, in the twilight and uncertainty of Greek philosophy, to catch a glimpse of a ray of light from beyond the grave: and for us walking in the light of the "promise of life in Christ Jesus" they have no practical value. In these arguments we have the phrase "the soul is immortal"; it occurs..... not less than 20 times in the whole dialogue (the Phaedo). Moreover, its meaning is indisputable. Plato uses the phrase to assert that every human soul, by its very nature, will continue in existence for endless ages" (The immortality of the soul: a protest pp.6,7.)

As has been pointed out this is not the declaration of scripture but the surmising of a heathen Greek philosopher. It is this misunderstanding of the "*soul*" and its "*immortal quality*" that has been used by Satan to mislead the people of God from the plain truth of His inspired word. What need is there for resurrection if the "*real person*" is already in heaven, and so the great hope of resurrection is relegated to a secondary, almost unimportant place in the whole biblical plan.

William Tyndale the translator and martyr could see this very clearly. In a refutation of the opinions held by Sir Thomas More where More had argued that according to Christ's words that "*God is not the God of the dead but of the living*", it proved Abraham Issac and Jacob were alive when Jesus said these words. Tyndale objected by saying that such reasoning destroyed Christ's argument completely.

"For when Christ allegeth the Scripture that God is Abraham's God, and addeth too, that God is not the God of the dead but of the living, and so proveth that Abraham must rise again: I deny Christ's argument if I say with Master More, that Abraham is yet alive, not because of resurrection, but because his soul is in heaven". Tyndale could see from the context of the verses that the incident of the burning bush, and the mention of Abraham, Issac and Jacob were not to prove these men were alive in heaven in some soul form but that they would rise at the resurrection. Note our Lord's own testimony regarding the incident "Now that the DEAD ARE RAISED, even Moses showed at the bush, when He calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, Issac and Jacob. For He is not the God of the dead but of the living: for all live unto Him", Luke 20v37-38. These verses are self explanatory and have no reference whatsoever to an intermediate state but ratherly refer to the fact of resurrection when the men mentioned, and millions more will live again, for truly in this sense "all live unto Him".

On most occasions when the resurrection is mentioned the phrase used is *"the resurrection of the body"*, we want to state categorically that such a phrase appears nowhere in Holy Scripture. The reason for using this unscriptural phrase is to teach that it is only the body and not the person which is raised. Let us see what the book truly says, here is the scriptural phrase *"The resurrection of the dead"*. The word *"dead"* here is a collective word, and could be translated *"deads"*. That would make the verse read, *"The resurrection of the deads"*, or in better english *"The resurrection of the dead ones/persons"*. Nowhere in the Greek is the word *"soma/body"* found when this phrase occurs. Just as the living (persons) are changed when Christ returns, even so the dead (persons) will be raised. The scriptures are clear it is not a body which comes out of the grave but a person. This is why the doctrine of the resurrection is vitally important.

Paul makes this clear in 1 Corinthians ch.15. After proving that Christ has risen from the dead he continues to show that his resurrection is the guarantee of ours. Some at Corinth had said *"there is no resurrection"*, and to highlight its importance to the believer Paul makes some outstanding, illuminating statements. In verse 16 we have this phrase *"If the dead rise not"*. Notice please the word dead is again a plural or collective word, Paul is talking about people not bodies. So, if the dead rise not what would be the consequence?

Verse 18 gives us the answer *"Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished"*. How could Paul have written such a thing under inspiration if he believed that the departed saints were already in heaven?, even if there were no resurrection in what sense could they be said to have perished?

It is absolutely clear what Paul is saying, if it were not for pre-conceived, unscriptural, platonic theories there could be no confusion. Paul is telling us that the only way out of the grave for the believer is by resurrection and if this does not take place then the believer has perished. Paul had no illusions of a bodiless, soulish, intermediate state after death but recognises the necessity of the resurrection if dead believers are ever going to be with Christ.

Just a few verses later he brings up another telling argument. In verse 29 the phrase occurs, "*If the dead rise not at all*", and then Paul continues, if that is the truth that the dead do not rise "*Why stand we in jeopardy every hour?....if after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if THE DEAD RISE NOT? Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die*". What could be clearer?, if there is no resurrection why should Paul endanger his life for the cause of Christ?, if the dead rise not what reason or advantage would there be in Paul placing his life in jeopardy? Please take note Paul is not talking about some sort of "*soul*" floating off at death but in his hope of resurrection. Were this not the true meaning of his words what possible sense could the last sentence have? If there is no resurrection, then says Paul I might as well eat and drink (ie. have a good time without any suffering), because if there is no resurrection, then at the end of it all I'll simply die and that will be the conclusion of the matter. These are not my comments but the Apostle Paul's.

Death is not the believers friend but his enemy. Verse 26 makes that clear "*the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death*". Death is not the portal which ushers the believer into glory, if that were so it would most certainly be the Christian's friend. Death is an enemy that will hold the believer in its icy grasp until the Prince of Life returns to emancipate him.

Is it not strange that when Paul wrote to the Thessalonians to comfort them with regard to their departed Christian loved ones he did not do so by telling them their dead friends were "*safe in the arms of Jesus*" or in heaven in any shape or form, but he comforts them by reminding them of Christ's return and how both living and raised dead people would together meet the Lord in the air. I will let Mr. Tyndale explain from his refutation of Sir Thomas More's opinions,

"I marvel that Paul had not comforted the Thessalonians with that doctrine, if he had wist it, that the souls of their dead had been in joy; as he did with the resurrection, that their dead would rise again".

The scriptures are clear, the dead are dead until resurrection, there is no intermediate state. As Christ said the righteous dead await "*the resurrection to*

*life*", the unsaved dead *"the resurrection to judgement"*. Martha got it right when she said to the Lord that her brother would rise again in the resurrection of the last day.

Much more could be said but we have covered other issues in other booklets we have prepared. So let us not cloud the issue. The resurrection is of paramount importance to every believer for if we die before Christ returns the only hope we have is "the resurrection of the dead".

We will let Job have the last word, *"Man lieth down and riseth not until the heavens be no more he shall not wake nor be raised out of his sleep"*. Job ch.14v12.

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