

THE RESURRECTION

(1 Cor. 15:12-21, 50-58)

Introduction

The question of a resurrection from the dead is strictly a Bible subject, insofar as its origin is concerned; for no one apart from God ever caused a dead person to live again. The term "resurrection" literally means a coming forth from the dead, a return from death to life; and that would be impossible if a death did not occur.

The Apostle Paul begins this section by declaring his intention to restate the gospel which he had preached in Corinth. The resurrection was the last problem to be discussed in the epistle.

1. Paul points out the relation of the Corinthians to this gospel (1-2).
2. He pointed out the basic issues of the gospel he preached (3-4).
 - (1) That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.
 - (2) That He was buried.
 - (3) That He has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.
3. Paul, then lists the appearances of Christ in proof of His resurrection (5-8).

4. Paul gives an explanation of his apostleship which was based on Christ's appearance to him (8-11).

Christ's Resurrection

In verses 12-34, the Apostle explains the bearing of Christ's resurrection on the subject of the resurrection of the dead.

1. Paul bases his first argument on the assumption of the Corinthians that there is no such thing as a resurrection of the dead. (12-19)
 - a) Question: If Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead — as Paul had just shown — how could some of them say that there was no resurrection of the dead?
 - b) Consequence of denying the resurrection: If there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ has not been raised.
 - c) Result of denying that Christ has been raised (14-19)
 - (1) The preaching of the apostles is vain.
 - (2) The faith of the brethren is vain.
 - (3) The apostles are found to be false witnesses of God.
 - (4) The faith of the brethren is vain and they are still in their sins.
 - (5) Those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.
 - (6) The apostles, who have only hoped in Christ in this life, are of all men most pitiable, if they go through life hoping for something that will never be.

2. In contrast with the gloomy thoughts of what would be true if there were no resurrection, Paul turns to the positive phase of his argument with the declaration, "but now hath Christ been raised from the dead" (vs. 20).
 - a) With this note of triumph, Paul begins to show the blessed consequences of that great event. All of the terrible consequences advanced in verses 14-19 are false because the original proposition is false. Christ has been raised and the consequences are the very opposite; the picture is one of hope and not of gloom.
 - b) The resurrection of Christ is regarded as "the first fruits of them that are asleep." In Old Testament times the first portion of the harvest was given to the Lord as an indication that all the harvest was in reality His. (Lev. 23:9-11).

Christ's resurrection is a pledge of the resurrection of all the saints. Physical death came upon man through the sin of Adam; it is "in Christ" that all shall be made alive (vss. 21-22). The order of the dead being made alive is: "Christ the first fruits; then they that are Christ's at his coming" (vs. 23). The "coming" clearly refers to the second coming of Christ. Since Paul does not mention the resurrection of the wicked in this discussion, it does not mean that the wicked will be raised some other time; however, in Acts 24:15 Paul tells us that "there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust."

Jesus Himself tells us that both the just and the wicked will be resurrected, that there will be a general resurrection. He says, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when *all* who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment." (John 5:28,29). This clearly shows that there will be one general resurrection composed of both wicked and righteous.

Paul does not mention the resurrection of the wicked in his discussion because it has no place in the discussion. He is discussing only the resurrection of

Christ and they that are His, Christ's. Those raised by Christ during His personal ministry are not under consideration at this point since they died again and their resurrection was not unto eternal life.

The coming of Christ and the resurrection bring the end (vs. 24). At that time Christ delivers the kingdom to God the Father, having abolished all enemies. Christ now reigns over His Kingdom and will reign until all enemies are subjugated; the last enemy to be destroyed is death, and it will be destroyed by the resurrection (vss. 25,26).

3. Paul bases his third argument on the relation of baptism to the resurrection (29-34).
 - a) Why be baptized if there is no resurrection (29-30)?
 - b) Why should Paul risk his life daily if there is no resurrection (31-32)?

Some Problems Answered

Verses 35-58. Here, in these verses, the Apostle answers some problems involved in the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead.

1. We find here a twofold question: How are the dead raised, and what kind of body will they have (35-50).

One can imagine the question being raised as to how a disintegrated body could possibly experience a resurrection. Paul addresses such an objector as "You foolish man!" and proceeds to point to the sowing of seed and the quickening of life from that seed as an analogy (things similar in certain respects) (xebh). The seed is sown, regardless of the kind of seed, is not the new plant which shall come up. The main point in analogy, resemblance is that there is first decomposition, then a new life (vs. 37). The seed dies that a new plant might grow from it. Each kind of seed produces an appropriate plant as God pleased. In view of this wonder, why should anyone raise the question as to how the dead are raised?

But Paul continues with the thought in verse 38: God gives a body to every seed, the body which He originally designed and concerning which He decreed that every thing should bring forth after its own kind. In the analogy, Paul described sowing of the seed, the burial of the body, and the coming forth of a new life in each case.

But Paul wishes to show that the resurrection body will be a different kind of body from that which we now possess, and he calls some other illustrations into use (vss. 39-41). There is a difference of flesh among men, beasts, birds and fishes. The point here is that God is able to provide a body suited for and adjusted to each part of His creation — even though all of it is different. God will do the same with our resurrection bodies. There will be a difference between the body that is sown and that which is raised. When all the variety in God's creation is contemplated, it can be seen that the nature of the resurrection body is a problem that can safely be left in God's hands.

2. In verses 42-44, Paul sets forth a number of differences between the body when sown and when raised: corruption vs. incorruption, that is, the present body is corruptible; the future body is incorruptible. The present body is subject to dishonour; the future one is glorified (a process already begun, 2 Cor. 3.18). The present body is limited by human weaknesses; the future body is spiritual (spiritual does not mean "made of spiritual material," but "the product of a miracle." (Cf. 1 Cor. 10.3,4).

All will agree that there is a natural (Greek, *psuchikon*) body, a body adapted to the present life; so, it is natural to expect that there shall be a spiritual (Greek, *pneumatikon*) body, one adapted to the spirit (vs. 44b). The fact that the first man Adam became a living soul (Greek for "soul", *psuche*) explains the reference to the "natural" body. Christ is a "life-giving spirit" (Greek for "spirit", *pneuma*); He will be the giver of the spiritual (*pneumatikon*) body.

But, says Paul, there is a certain order that is followed — first the natural, then the spiritual. As to their earthly appearance, Adam was before the incarnate Christ. The natural body of man is first, then there will be the resurrection body later (vs. 46). Adam was made from the dust by the creative power of God; Christ, of His own volition, left Heaven and became a man (vs. 47). All men are like Adam in the fact that they are dust; those who are Christ's will be given bodies like His at the resurrection (vs. 48). In this life man bears the image of Adam; in heaven he shall bear the image of Christ (vs. 49).

One might ask, what about the physical characteristics of this present body — will they be evident in the resurrected body? One might reply, what stage in the human life is the "real" body? Only the full grown man? What about the infant? In all stages of human life man has a body, although that same body may not even be recognisable as the same person in its differing stages. The main thrust of the resurrection body is that Christians do not seek to be without a body, but to have a new body (2 Cor. 5:1-6). All of this is God's doing. Christians need not fear, for Jesus' resurrection is God's guarantee He will destroy death for them, as He has already forgiven their sins. And with whatever body God gives, we shall be like Him.

The Great Victory

Verses 50-58. Fleshly bodies cannot enter into the kingdom of glory (vs. 50). Hence, a change is necessary, and Paul proceeds to tell about this change which he terms a "mystery," something that can be known only by divine revelation. Not all shall die before the coming of Christ; some will be alive at the time of that great event. But all, whether living or dead, shall be changed at Christ's coming, and this change must occur before anyone enters heaven (vss. 51, 52).

The divine signal which announces these momentous events is described as the sounding of the trumpet (cf. 1 Thess. 4:16) (Lev. 1:7). The Apostle Paul speaks of this as "the last trump." (vs. 52). Here the Greek for the word last is 'eschatos,' which means, utmost, the fullest extent, extreme, last terms. This explains to us that there will be no other signal a thousand years later or at any other time. As other passages show, all the dead, both wicked and righteous, will be raised at this time; however, Paul does not discuss the resurrection of the wicked in this passage. In order for the body to enter heaven, it must undergo a change: this corruptible body, one that is subject to decay, must be clothed with incorruption; this mortal must put on immortality (vs. 53). When this occurs, the passage, "Death is swallowed up in victory" (Isa. 25:8), will have been fulfilled. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. To this triumphant note of hope, Paul adds his affectionate appeal for the brethren to remain unmovable in the work of the Lord for now they know that their labours are not in vain.

George Ebejer,
24 Tower Street, Cospicua,
Malta.