

Death, Immortality, and Heaven: No. 6

In this long series there has been repetition. Some may be useful in relating points. I hope none is too boring. This essay will deal with two main passages of Scripture which I have touched on before. I think they are vital to our discussion but I see no one else reaching the conclusions that I am drawing from them. That should give you a hint as to how far wrong I am! Maybe I can erase that hint if you will stay with me.

This deals with the nature of the resurrection. In previous lessons I have questioned the traditional concept of our physical bodies being immortalized and entering heaven with physical characteristics. And I have shown that the resurrection was in the “last day” after Jesus took his atonement into the Holy of Holies, his opening the way into heaven, and his “parousia,” that is, returning in manifestation, demonstrated by the events leading to the culmination and dissolution of the old covenant system and confirmation of the new covenant.

“RESURRECTION HAS TAKEN PLACE”

Paul was instructing Timothy about problems among his people. A dangerous teaching of some was spreading like gangrene. *“Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place and they destroy the faith of some”* (2 Tim. 2:17-19 NIV). We can see readily how such a belief could destroy their hope of eternal life. But that is not the point of this study. We want to ask how those men could convince people that the resurrection was past.

Evidently, those two men were persuasive and effective. If you had been listening to them, would you not have asked for some evidence that the resurrection was past? How could they have proved their claims? You could have gone to the tombs and burying grounds and observed that no graves had been disturbed. You and they could have seen the bones of the dead in the tombs. Thus, in such a simple manner, disciples could have made fools of those two teachers. The big question -- why did disciples not prove by such unquestionable evidence that they were wrong?

The answer is simple and undeniable. They were not teaching a raising of dead bodies. **THEY HAD NOT BEEN TAUGHT TO EXPECT A PHYSICAL RESURRECTION!!**

What other answer can you give? The only counter-argument I have received declared that you cannot prove a negative. That, however, is using a negative premise to prove that you cannot prove a negative! Or, is my logic a bit confused? If opened and vacated graves and tombs might have confirmed a physical resurrection, then undisturbed bones would demonstrate that there had been no physical resurrection.

Neither Paul nor Timothy had taught them that the earthly body would rise up in any state, whether physical, “immortalized,” or “spiritualized.” Paul taught, as we have observed in previous lessons, that it is the spirit that is immortalized and remains with God when it leaves the earthly nature behind forever.

“THE DAY OF THE LORD HAS COME.”

Now let us consider a related thought. *“Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come”* (2 Thes. 2:1f NIV). They rightly connected their BEING GATHERED TO HIM with his COMING. Some were teaching that Jesus had ALREADY RETURNED. That would mean that their dead loved ones had missed out on such a resurrection and that they themselves might have also. So this was having similar impact as the teaching of Hymenaeus and Philetus.

In his previous letter Paul had assured them, *“We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who sleep in him. According to the LORD’S OWN WORD, we tell you that WE who are still alive, who are left TILL THE COMING OF THE LORD, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep”* (1 Thes. 4:14-15 NIV). Paul was not giving those assurances to you and me or people living centuries later. That would have been of little comfort to the Thessalonian disciples. Addressing those disciples he consoled, *“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and BODY be kept blameless at the COMING of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it”* (5:23). Read the entire letter to see that he was addressing them, not us. Are any of those people still around in their physical bodies?

Due to these teachings and others, we can see why Paul did not tell them to look in the tombs to see proof that the coming/parousia of the Lord with the raising of the dead had not occurred. He had not taught them to expect a restoration of their physical bodies. They would need other grounds as evidence that the dead were raised, that is, that their spirits had been received and immortalized. Paul told them what to look for as evidence. That evidence was the fulfillment of things that Jesus said would transpire before his soon return at the end of the age during the lifetime of some of his hearers.

Jesus had told his disciples (not us!) what to look for as evidence of his coming in Matthew 24. Some of them would live to see it (v. 34). His coming/presence/parousia would be a manifestation rather than in a physical body riding clouds. God had manifested himself in the wilderness in the fire and cloud and later in becoming flesh. In similar manner Jesus manifested himself in fulfilling the events he had predicted. Raising physical bodies was not a part of that manifestation any more than was the literal falling of the stars which Jesus said would happen then.

Again, correct concepts concerning the “how” and “when” of the resurrection are not essential to salvation. God will do what he has promised whether we understand it or not.

If there has been no resurrection, no child of God is with God in heaven yet! []

(Cecil Hook: November 2005)

“I believe; help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24).

APPENDIX (Inflamed?): I seldom receive negative responses to my stuff, but most of those that do come are in response to my “Hook’s Points” segments. I received three or four in regard to FR 290 that deserve attention.

I stated that the most downtrodden and impoverished people are usually the most prolific in increasing the population. I had in mind impoverished third world countries where starvation is so prevalent and mortality rates are so high. It is true that I have no figures to prove that. The starvation and mortality rates, however, not the lower birth rate, keep the population from increasing. It seems unmerciful to me that parents would bring more children into that environment to suffer from such things. That was my point. Others felt that it was God’s will that those hapless children be born, but I think it was the will and choice of the parents for God did not compel them to bear them.

One reader had objected to my lack of including all of the Iraqis who were killed when I pointed to the political motives for emphasizing that earlier 1,864 of our heroic military had been killed while making no mention of the 16,694 innocent people being killed each year in this country by drunk drivers. A brother reminded me that as many as 30,559 Iraqi civilians have been killed. Granted. But the number of those killed by drunk drivers is for one year, not for the extent of the war. I stated that most of the Iraqi deaths were at the hands of their own people. I have no proof of the numbers, but the number killed by their own Muslim terrorists is large and growing.

Then I stated that the baby involved in partial birth abortion would have exited the birth canal alive within five minutes. A brother corrects me stating that no one performs a “partial birth abortion” five minutes before natural childbirth would have taken place, but that “Dilation and Extraction” is only rarely performed in late pregnancy, and if it is, it is only for special cases. He may be correct if we allow the distinction in natural childbirth and “Dilation and Extraction.” Another term is “Internal Cranial Decompression.” The inventor of the procedure called it “a quick, surgical outpatient method” for late second trimester and early third-semester abortions. However, that would not rule out the procedure in a natural birth process in the third-semester instead of a “Dilate and Extract” procedure.

On November 5, 2003, President George W. Bush signed the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act (HR 760, S3), which defined partial-birth abortions as: *“an abortion in which--- (A) the person performing the abortion deliberately and intentionally vaginally delivers a living fetus until, in the case of a head-first presentation, the entire fetal head is outside the body of the mother, or, in the case of breech presentation, any part of the fetal trunk past the navel is outside the body of the mother for the purpose of performing an overt*

act that the person knows will kill the partially delivered living fetus; and (B) performs the overt act, other than completion of delivery, that kills the partially delivered living fetus.”

That “official” definition does not say “except for Dilation and Extraction or except for cases of Internal Cranial Decompression.”

Question: if no one was using those procedures, why would the ban have been legislated? Was it preventive, just in case someone might think of performing it?

When does life begin? You were never a sperm. You were never an ovum. But you were an embryo – the sperm and ovum joined in life with its own identity. Did it only reach a state of recognizable, acceptable life after three months, six months, delivery, the age of twelve, or the age of eighteen? If we do not accept it as an embryo, where is a defining point at any period of the development thereafter? Only God can know and define it, and he has not told you and me. So, it would be presumptuous of me to speak for God where he has not spoken.

God has put life in our trust. We must deal with it in the most loving and merciful manner. Discerning that course is not always easy, like by measuring every situation by the rigid dogma. Mercy is not administered by dogma. For example: I am not free to shoot you just because I am not comfortable with you for the law forbids my killing you. But if you are shooting at my family intent on killing them, love and mercy toward my family demands that I protect them even if I must kill you in doing so. []