

# CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

<b>Series:</b>	<b>The Heidelberg Catechism</b>		Pastor/Teacher
<b>Number:</b>	<b>41</b>		Gary L.W. Johnson
<b>Text:</b>	<b>I Corinthians 15:12-58</b>		
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## The Resurrection of the Body

### 22. Lord's Day

#### Question 57. What comfort does the "resurrection of the body" afford thee?

**Answer:** That not only my soul after this life shall be immediately taken up to Christ its head; (a) but also, that this my body, being raised by the power of Christ, shall be reunited with my soul, and made like unto the glorious body of Christ. (b)

(a) Luke 16:22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; Luke 23:43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise. Philip. 1:21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Philip. 1:23 For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: (b) 1 Cor. 15:53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 1 Cor. 15:54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed upon victory. Job 19:25 For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: Job 19:26 And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: 1 John 3:2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. Philip. 3:21 Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

Most of you will remember the mass suicide of thirty-nine members of the "Heaven's Gate" cult. In the days following their deaths, video interviews with the leader Marshall Applewhite and his followers spoke of their bodies as "vehicles." They firmly believed that by committing suicide, they could reach Paradise by leaving their bodies and hooking up with a UFO that was following the Hale-Bopp comet. Applewhite, among other things, claimed to be a reincarnation of Jesus Christ. He taught his followers that the human body is merely a vehicle or a container inhabited by a divine soul from the "Kingdom Level Above the Human." Such "incarnate souls" find other souls to give them an "implant of knowledge concerning the TRUTH," weaning them from "humanness," in particular, making themselves genderless in preparation for the "disconnect," which is entry into the next world.<sup>1</sup>

These were, as we later learned, very intelligent people. Call them kooks, gullible and naïve followers of a man who had lost touch with reality—but they were sincere in what they believed. Many people think the same of Christians. Clarence Darrow, the famous lawyer in the

Scopes trial, once said in reference to the Christian belief in life after death that it was an “absurd idea...it is kept alive by hope and fear, by a childish faith, and by cowardice.” H. L. Mencken, the noted journalist and social critic of the first half of this century, wrote: “I do not believe in immortality and have no desire for it. The belief in it issues from the puerile egos of inferior men.” Christianity teaches that there is life after death—but it is not an escape from the body—in fact, biblical Christianity (unlike Gnostic forms of Christianity) emphatically teaches the doctrine of the resurrection of the body.

## I. THE CENTRALITY OF THE RESURRECTION (vv. 12-19)

The realities of the resurrection are established upon the absolute certainty of the actual event. The Corinthians had imbibed the Greek notion that the body was innately evil and a bodily resurrection was absurd (cf. Acts 17:32-34). Paul responds with the consequences of such a denial.

A. This is a Denial of Christ’s Resurrection (vv. 12, 13, 16). Jesus was a genuine man and possessed a real human body. If He has been raised, then there is a resurrection of the body.

B. This Denial Makes the Christian Faith Vain (vv. 14-16). In a word, if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then forget it—chuck the Gospel out the window. The JKV word *vain* (Greek KENŌS) means devoid of value, empty, useless. If Christ did not rise bodily from the grave, the Gospel is a hoax, a mirage.

C. This Denial Means Christians are Still in Their Sins (vv. 17-19). There is no salvation, no forgiveness of sins unless Christ has been raised from the dead. The word translated *vain* here (Greek MATAIOS) refers to that which is void of useful aim or effect (NIV translates this *futile*). Regardless of the sincerity of our faith, sincerity won’t make it real. If our “faith” is not based upon the reality of the empty tomb, then we are only fooling ourselves.

## II. THE FACT OF THE RESURRECTION (vv. 20-34)

The Apostle now moves to the reality of the resurrection. It actually *did happen*, and this in turn points to the unity of Christ’s work on our behalf. Redemption and resurrection belong together, and those who benefit from Christ’s work await in eager anticipation the redemption of their bodies (cf. Romans 8:21-23). There is a proper sequence, a two-fold order.

A. Christ the Firstfruits. To what is the Apostle referring? There can be little doubt that this language refers to the “firstfruit” offerings of grain, wine, cattle, and the like appointed by the Mosaic law (Exodus 23:19; Leviticus 23:10; Numbers 15:20; 18:8; Deuteronomy 18:4; 26:1-10). “*Firstfruits* expresses the notion of organic connection and unity, the inseparability of the initial quantity from the whole. It is particularly this aspect which gives these sacrifices their significance.”<sup>2</sup>

B. Believers the Harvest. In late spring or early summer the Israelites would go into the wheat field and gather the first heads of ripened grain. These would be offered up as a sacrifice and a promise of the general harvest in due season.<sup>3</sup> The Apostle Paul uses this as an illustration of Christ and the church. The Apostle here is arguing by analogy. What happened to Christ in the resurrection (and transformation of His physical body) is going to also happen to Christians at some time in the future. Note how Paul reasons here in terms of how belief in this

biblical truth affects how we live. If life ends with death, then let us eat, drink and be merry—such was the reasoning of the pagan world.

### III. THE MANNER OF THE RESURRECTION (vv. 35-49)

Paul next turns his attention to the question, “How are the dead raised and with what kind of body?”—His answer is in verses 36-38 and the emphasis is on the power of God. In essence the Apostle argues as follows: since God is able to give the kind of bodies needed for life at this earthly and physical level, He has power to give life at the eternal and spiritual level. This is illustrated in two ways.

A. The World of Vegetation. Wheat is a grain which, in the process of time falls to the ground, and, through the various processes that are inherent in its properties, it dies. But out of this death comes not one grain of wheat, but many.

B. The World of Creatures. Human beings possess one kind of body, animals possess different kinds of bodies, while fish and birds are likewise entirely different. The heavenly bodies (moon and stars), it will be granted, are also different. These “bodies” all have one thing in common—they are limited. They all suffer from the effects of time. Our earthly bodies are adapted to the needs of this physical plane of existence, while the resurrected body will be a body perfectly adapted to the needs of the eternal state. It is a real body—but it is a new body, one that is conformed to Christ (cf. Philippians 3:20-21).

### IV. THE NECESSITY OF THE RESURRECTION (vv. 50-58)

The question of *when* this event will occur is now addressed. Paul takes up the subject of the nature of the resurrected body. This is done first negatively and then positively.

A. The Negative. “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.” This assertion is not meant to imply that the resurrected body will not be physical. Rather, the Apostle is stating the fact that our bodies as presently constituted, i.e., weak, frail and subject to corruption, cannot inherit the full blessing of the eternal state. There must be a change. This change will affect not only those who are alive at Christ’s return, but those who have died as well (cf. I Thessalonians 4:16-17).

B. The Positive. The perishable and mortal must put on that which is imperishable and immortal. This is the only way we can enjoy the glories of the eternal state. We will no longer be subject to death. The *result* of the resurrection is now stated – death is completely robbed of its victory (cf. Revelation 20:5-6). “Through sin, death has had dominion over man, but through the redemptive work of God through Christ, the dominion of both sin and death has been defeated. Victory over sin comes in regeneration; victory over death comes in resurrection. It is Paul’s view that God’s purpose for man is to redeem him in his total personality. Only through the process of resurrection can this victory be completely realized.”<sup>4</sup>

CONCLUSION: The Christian belief in life after death does not promote escapism (especially the mentality demonstrated by the Heaven’s Gate cult). On the contrary, this doctrine promotes sanctification. It compels us to faithfulness to Christ (I Peter 4:7; II Peter 3:14-18).

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of the Gnosis roots of this cult, see Peter Jones, “Hell at Heaven’s Gate: Computer cult merely a new take on ancient Gnosticism,” *World* (April 12, 1997), p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> R.B. Gaffin, Jr., *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Pauline Soteriology* (Baker, 1978), p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> The language of firstfruits is used elsewhere in the New Testament. In Romans 16:5 and I Corinthians 16:15 it is used of the converts in a particular location. In II Thessalonians 2:13 and James 1:18 it is used of Christians in general, and in Revelation 14:4 of the 144,000 saints in heaven.

<sup>4</sup> Ray Summers, *The Life Beyond* (Broadman, 1959), p. 74.