

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Special Messages		Pastor/Teacher
Text:	Romans 8:11		Gary L. W. Johnson
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THE RESURRECTION: CHRIST'S AND OURS

Underlying the whole of Paul's understanding of the gospel is a fully-developed doctrine of union with Christ as the basic relationship from which the salvation proceeds. Paul writes of *judicial union* (6:1-14), *moral union* (6:15-23), *marital union* (7:1-6), *dynamic union* (8:1-17), and finally of *eternal union* (8:18-39). In Romans 8:1-10, the apostle, referring to the believer's co-crucifixion with Christ, has indicated that the believer has been released from the Law of Moses, having died to that by which he was formerly held. He has illustrated this momentous fact by the freedom of a wife, after the death of a husband, to marry another. In this case, the old relationship with Adam came to an end in the death of Christ and, therefore, the believer is freed from the old husband, the old man under the Law, has been married to another husband, the Lord Jesus Christ. This, of course, does not mean that the believer is freed from the obligation to live in a righteous manner. In fact, Paul says, it is expected that he shall serve in newness of the Spirit (cf. 7:6). The obvious objection, to the thinking of the apostle, surfaces at this point in the exposition of salvation. It might be phrased in this way, "Paul, you have said that we died to the Law of Moses (7:1-6). Are you not, then, putting the two in the same category, sin and God's Law? Are you not implying, if not saying, that the Law is sinful?" It is this to which the apostle turns now. The question itself plunges us into the subject of sin, a most unpopular subject in today's climate of opinion. Our cultural climate conditions people to question *any* notion of objective morality. In fact, our current cultural crisis is deeply rooted, and grows out of the social revolution of the 1960's with its emphasis on anti-institutionalism, anti-authoritarianism and autonomous individualism.¹ *Freedom* from any and all forms of restraint – especially in the area of personal morality, was at the center of the counter-culture of the times, which has now become mainstream.² D. A. Carson recently observed, "Under postmodernism, personal morality easily becomes a social construction. Certainly, in university evangelism today it is far harder to get across something of what the Bible says about sin (whatever vocabulary is used) than it is to explain the doctrine of the Trinity or the importance of the resurrection."³

A few years ago, The Discovery Channel aired the much-hyped documentary, *The Jesus Tomb*. James Cameron, renowned filmmaker of such blockbuster movies as "Titanic" and "The Terminator," and Simeka Jacobovici, a self-proclaimed Indiana Jones type investigative journalist, combined their efforts (with the help of James Tabor, head of the department of Religion at the University of North Carolina and author of *The Jesus Dynasty: The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity*) to produce this farce, which even the noted liberal scholar Bart Ehrman called "a bunch of hooey!"⁴ There are *a lot* of things wrong with this documentary from the standpoint of archaeology and history (cf. the various items linked at www.dennyburk.com that I included in last week's bulletin). But it is the exegetical and theological blunders that I wish to focus on. For example, in "The Jesus Tomb" there is an astounding theory that John 19 presents a conversation between Jesus on the cross and his wife Mary Magdalene, with their son being the Beloved Disciple! The problem, of course, as Ben Witherington has pointed out, is that Jesus is addressing his own mother, Mary. John 19:26 is quite clear – Jesus saw his mother standing there, and spoke to her about the Beloved Disciple, who is certainly not his son. In John 13 and following, the Beloved Disciple is portrayed as

one of the adult disciples in the upper room. Not as a child. Here is but one more example of how normal interpretations of the Biblical evidence are ignored and rejected in favor of rewriting the text to support the theory, and much later non-eyewitness Gnostic evidence from the Acts of Philip is made crucial to the case, even when that evidence itself does not likely support the case at all!⁵ The makers of “The Jesus Tomb” have been arguing that finding Jesus’ bones shouldn’t damage Christian faith, since Jesus’ body need not be resurrected, only his spirit. J. Dominic Crossan, of the infamous “Jesus Seminar,” is shown declaring that if this tomb in fact does prove to be that of Jesus, his faith would not be shaken in the least, because the bodily resurrection of Christ is not all that important. In the panel discussion with Ted Koppel, James Tabor argued from 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus’ resurrected body was spiritual, not physical. Burk rightly argues that Tabor’s interpretation of the apostle Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 15 is seriously mistaken. Here is an excerpt of the relevant text from 1 Corinthians 15: **1 Corinthians 15:35, 44**; *But someone will say, “How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?” . . . it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.* Tabor wrongly assumes that “spiritual” means the opposite of “physical.” But that is not at all what Paul means here. “Spiritual” does not mean “non-physical.” *It means something that is wrought by the Holy Spirit.* It is the same word that is used in 1 Corinthians 2:13: **1 Corinthians 2:13**; *And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.* In this text, “spiritual truths” are not “non-physical” truths, but they are truths that are “taught by the Spirit.” In other words, they come from the Holy Spirit. This is precisely how Paul uses the term “spiritual” in 1 Corinthians 15:44. The “spiritual body” is a “Spiritual body” (notice the capital “S”).⁶ It’s a physical body that has been resurrected by Holy Spirit power. As we have noted in Romans 8:11, Paul clearly links the Holy Spirit to the physical resurrection of the body.

- I. **THE TESTIMONY OF THE APOSTLE PAUL.** Wilbur Smith, a grand old Bible teacher of a past generation, pointed out in one of his classic books⁷ that within twenty years of our Lord’s Resurrection, the Apostle Paul wrote his First Epistle to the Church at Corinth, and toward the end of this Epistle, in his famous fifteenth chapter, he supports his entire argument for our Resurrection upon what he believed was the indisputable fact of Christ’s Resurrection, in the following powerful testimony, which rationalism has never been able to invalidate. “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, he was seen of about five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James, then of all the Apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time (1 Cor. 15:3-8).” Well has Professor Milligan said, “both in his addresses in the Acts, and in his own letters, the Apostle shows that faith in a risen and living Christ is the undercurrent by the force of which he is irresistibly borne along, whatever at any particular moment are his feelings or purposes or aims. It is not conceivable that so powerful an effect should have been produced upon him, had he not himself been thoroughly satisfied as to the fact to which alone it can be traced. It is certainly out of a conviction as clearly formed and as firmly held as human conviction can be that he speaks. Let us suppose for a moment that he was wrong, it would evidently have been a hopeless task to try to convince him that it was so. We may listen to him or not; his testimony will never change. All this is the more remarkable when we consider that St. Paul was thoroughly alive to the extraordinary nature of the fact, and that he gives his testimony as one who is aware that it needs confirmation by others, and is under a solemn sense of his own responsibility to be faithful. . . . Note especially his emphasis on the fact that of the five hundred brethren to whom he refers *the greater part remain unto this present, but some have fallen asleep* and to the horror with which he shrinks from being found a false witness of God. . . . St. Paul so gives his testimony to the Resurrection of our Lord, that the most skillful counsel in a modern court of law will

scarcely venture to think that it would be in his power to shake it by any cross-examination he could conduct, were the Apostle now before him.”⁸ Whatever be one’s final conviction regarding the Resurrection of our Lord, it is admitted by everyone that such a supposed event is so interwoven with all the New Testament documents that to eliminate it from the Gospels, the Acts, and the Epistles, is to render the entire New Testament record hopelessly confused. It would be to deny not only certain words of our Lord in His teaching, but also to repudiate many accusations made against Him by His enemies; it would be to make the end of our Lord’s life nothing but a tragedy. It would be to leave unexplained and unexplainable the formation of the Christian Church. It would be to leave us without dependable records of the early Apostolic messages. It would be to make the conversion and conviction of the Apostle Paul the greatest riddle of human history. Without the Resurrection, we do not know the ultimate end of Christ’s life on earth; we do not know why the Apostles began to preach; we do not know why the Apostle Paul became convinced of such a supernatural event; we do not know why the Sabbath day was changed; we do not know how the Christian Church came to be established. With the Resurrection admitted as a fact, the stupendous themes of the New Testament become reasonable, and its narratives logical. Without the Resurrection we have nothing but a tissue of dreams, ethics resting in air, truth proclaimed without evidence, and we remain of all men most miserable. Whatever ultimately may be thought of the reality or unreality of this particular event, at least it must be confessed that it is inextricably woven into the fabric of the New Testament welcoming the most careful investigation.

- II. ***THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST: A RESURRECTION OF CHRIST’S BODY.*** Before examining the evidence for our Lord’s resurrection, let it be clearly understood that by *resurrection* can be meant nothing else than a *resurrection of the body*. There is no such thing as the “resurrection of a spirit.” Resurrection means being raised again. The spirit never has to be raised again from the grave, because it never enters the grave; a spirit can know no resurrection from the dead, because a spirit never dies! The New Testament continually insists that it was a body which was placed in the tomb, so it was a *body* which came forth from the tomb. As the Apostle Paul says, “He was buried, and He rose again the third day.” That which rose again is that which was buried. A spirit is never buried. It is sheer nonsense to talk about believing in a *spiritual* resurrection of Christ. There is no such thing. If it were a spirit that was being raised, there would be no sense in insisting on the third day. A spirit could manifest itself at any time after death. Exactly what nature of Christ’s risen body was, it is not our place in this chapter to discuss, but as Jams Orr well says, “though the conditions of existence of the body were, indeed, in some respects naturally altered, as befitted the new state on which it had entered, it was still a body which could be seen, touched, handled; which evinced its identity with the body that had been crucified, by the print of the nails and the spear-mark in the side” (Luke 24:39, 40; John 20:24-28).⁹

CONCLUSION: Geerhardus Vos, one of the great Old Princeton Theologians, commenting on the expression “the Spirit of Him that raised Jesus from the dead” (v. 11), declares: “In this designation of God resides the force of the argument: what God did for Jesus He will do for the believer likewise. It is presupposed by the Apostle, though not expressed in so many words, that God raised Jesus through the Spirit. Hence the argument from the analogy between Jesus and the believer is further strengthened by the observation, that the instrument through whom God effected this in Jesus is already present in the readers. The idea that the Spirit works instrumentally in the resurrection is plainly implied. This is altogether apart from the interesting divergence in the construction of *DIA* which occurs with the accusative in several important authorities. That would yield the paraphrase: If the Spirit of God who raised Jesus dwells in you, then God will create for that Spirit the same appropriate *habitat* as He created for Him in the resurrection-body of Jesus. This is a unique idea; it

reserves the relation between Spirit and resurrection-body; usually the Spirit is for the sake of the new body, here the new body would be for the sake of adorning the Spirit. But, interesting though the thought may be, the other reading (*DIA cum genitive*) seems to have more textual weight in its favor. Adopting this, we paraphrase: If the Spirit of God who raised Jesus dwells in you, then God will make the indwelling Spirit accomplish for you what He accomplished for Jesus in the latter's resurrection."¹⁰

ENDNOTES

¹ "It is impossible to overstate just how permeated modern society is with expressive individualism. The highest self is the liberated self from the constraints of oppression and self-doubt. The moral horizon of expressive individualism is unbounded self-determination and self-definition." A. T. Walker, *Faithful Reason: Natural Law Ethics for God's Glory and Our Good* (B&H Academic, 2024), p. 23.

² A recent example of how this mentality has spread within the ranks of the Church is seen in the remarks of Calvin University philosophy professor James K. A. Smith, calling for his university to "unhook" itself from its denominational affiliation with The Christian Reformed Church because of its stand on homosexuality. According to Smith, Calvin University will fail to be authentically "Reformed" if it stays wedded to a "narrow dogmatism" that does not honor "courageous curiosity" while maintaining its commitment to upholding biblical views on sexuality and gender. James K. A. Smith's example shows that even a theology that claims to be "biblical" or "Reformed" can go wrong if it ignores what the Bible says about creation and natural law. If someone rejects the idea that creation has an order we can understand, their Christian ethics will eventually break down. In this way, Smith has become a theologian who stands against nature. Cf. the critique by Andrew T. Walker, "Theologians *against* nature: Scripture and Creation Tells the Same Truths," World Opinions, April 10, 2025.

³ D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant With the Emerging Church* (Zondervan, 2005), p. 101.

⁴ Interview in the *Dallas Morning News* (March 1, 2007), Ehrman does not have any problem with the notion that Jesus died and that somewhere his body rotted in a grave. He finds this documentary, however, totally laughable. In a recent interview in *Biblical Archaeology Review* (March/April, 2007), Ehrman clearly stated his views, "If Jesus hadn't been crucified, if he grew up to be an old man and died and was buried in a family plot outside of Nazareth, then for me, when I was a Christian, that would've destroyed my faith. In other words, the faith is rooted in certain historical claims. As historical claims, they can be shown as either probably or improbable. And I got to a point where the historical claims about Jesus seemed implausible, especially the resurrection. Not the crucifixion – I think Jesus was crucified like a lot of other people were crucified, and I think that, like a lot of other people, he stayed dead." (p. 52)

⁵ www.benwitherington.blogspot.com/March

⁶ www.dennyburk.com./March5,2007

⁷ W. Smith, *The Supernaturalness of Christ* (rpt. Baker, 1974), p. 192.

⁸ William Milligan, *The Resurrection of Christ* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1977), p. 43.

⁹ James Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1980), p. 37.

¹⁰ G. Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (rpt. Baker, 1979), p. 163.