

The resurrection of the human body from the dead.

“Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; AND MANY BODIES of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.” (Matt. 27:50-54.)

This marvelous resurrection of “*many*” bodies of the saints is a guarantee, that our own resurrection is on the way — make no mistake. Satan would strip us of this blessed hope, even as his majesty the devil walketh about seeking whom he may devour; but the aging Peter gives us the antidote to Satan’s poison: *“whom resist, stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”* (1 Pet. 5:8-11.) Beloved, God’s power is able to raise you from the dead, and it is pledged to do so — come all the powers of Hell and the devils’ brutes and brute-beasts. As when Satan contended with the Lord God over the body of Moses when time came to raise Moses from the dead. The time of the restitution of all things will come. We are dealing with the subject of the resurrection of the human body from the dead. To wit:

“How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?”
(1 Cor. 15:35)

We are all standing upon the threshold of an awesome future, replete with facts and instinct with entities, about which we know but little. Let but the heart cease its beating, or one vital function of this body cease its office, and we are gone — gone! to grapple with the stern truths of ages, at once interminable, inconceivable, and unknown. “To be or not to be,” after death, is answered, and nearly all men, though with different degrees of faith, are looking confidently to an existence beyond the grave.

The idea of immortality has descended down the stream of human generations from the first pair in Paradise, running down every branch from the central tide, disappearing on one, corrupted in another, and becoming more lucid and satisfactory in another, to the present age. It is seen in the language, literature, and manners of every age, in the history, philosophy, and poetry of every people. It is seen in the retributive horrors of Tartarus, and the rich fields and streams of Elysium, the Hesperian seas and islets of the red man, the Heaven and Hell of the Christians. But the heathen apply the idea of immortality to the soul only. The ancient heathen complained that the sun went down at night, and arose in the morning, but their friends went down in the gloomy darkness of death, and rose no more. They saw upon the face of every mysterious Providence which swept the earth, in bold and living colors the pencillings of immortality; they felt the truth attested within by an instinctive shrinking back from annihilation, yet the tomb was invested with an eternal darkness, and the body surrendered to a perpetual sleep.

With them the night of death was starless; there was no anticipated morning whose auroral splendors would break in upon the darkness of the grave, and hang the rainbow of hope over the dust of the dead. The idea of the resurrection of the body does not appear to have occurred to them. To what source is the world then indebted for its existence? Not to reason, for the mind has not the requisite data; not to nature, for it is super-nature; not to science, for it is beyond the province of science; but to the Bible. It is the great fact recognized in the text, and is purely a subject of revelation. Let semi-infidel divines seek for evidence of the resurrection elsewhere; it is only found in the Bible. I would not exclude those rich illustrations corroborating Bible fact, which pour from every department in philosophic and material existence — no; but I appeal to the Bible, proven as it is to be the Word of God, as the highest evidence of the resurrection of the dead. Listen to the authority with which the Bible speaks; to wit: *“Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. (Isa. 26:19). “Dead men”! “Dead bodies”! “They shall arise”! — “He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom. 8:11).*

“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to everlasting contempt.” (Dan. 12:2)

“Asleep”! “Awake”! — “The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth;” (John 5:28, 29). Such announcements, Beloved, have kindled a smile upon the brow of bereavement, and a star in the graves of the departed Loved Ones. This doctrine being peculiar to Christianity, and having nothing analogous in nature, has been a favorite object of attack by every school of infidels since its blessed announcement. It is condemned as false, because it involves a mystery. This argument is of no force unless it is true universally, unless everything that involves a mystery is false, too. If it is true universally, if everything that involves a mystery is false, then there is nothing true in the universe. The argument proves too much, thus the argument is worth nothing. The infidel confounds two things very essentially different; mystery as to fact, and mystery as to a mode. A fact may be plain, while the manner of its production may be mysterious.

The doctrine of the resurrection is a doctrine of fact, and as such is clear, but its mode is mysterious. The heretic confounds mystery with absurdity. An absurdity is something contradictory in its nature to human reason and common sense, such as supposing an effect greater than its cause; a mystery is something beyond human comprehension on the account of its magnitude, or the relation it sustains to infinite power. The resurrection of the human body is not an absurdity, for it is not contrary to human reason; but a mystery, for it involves the agency of infinite power to accomplish it. A doctrine whose foundation stone is omnipotence could not from its nature be subjected to the feeble rules and restrictions of reason. To deny the truth of the resurrection because its mode is a mystery to us, is to say that a finite mind is equal in discovering and investigating power to all difficulties involved in the existence and nature of any truth, however intimate its relations to the great infinite, either in being or principle. Another heretic says, the resurrection contradicts the great principles of science. No science is perfect; it has been the business of one age to modify and improve the science of the past age; a future age will but expose the learned follies of this. Science is scarcely out of its swaddling-clothes. Is it entitled to more credence than the Bible? Must this old Book, hoary with the age of centuries, written with the finger of inspiration, born at Sinai, completed amid the splendors of the Apocalypse, whose footprints are seen in the crumbled dust of earth’s wrecked and ruined greatness.

This Bible, whose teachings are godlike, whose precepts are thunder-driven, whose promises are the hope of the world, fly the stage before the gorgeous diction and sacrilegious pretensions of the ungodly and pseudo-philosophy? But I could never see any point of relevancy in the objection. In what department of true science are those principles found and taught, conflicting with the doctrine of the resurrection? I appeal to all the tomes in the wide range of scientific lore for an answer – they are nowhere. All science is founded upon the discoveries of sense; and if it teaches such principles, it has exceeded its province, therefore it is no argument.

Revelation is the only oracle of our faith, and the proper tribunal before which to refer our theological questions. It is under its potent influence alone that life and immortality become divine realities. To go to science to settle matters of faith, is like going to a dictionary to learn history, or to geology to learn mathematics. Again, the objector says, it is contrary to our experience. But the great error in the objection is, that the objector assumes that his individual experience is the universal experience of the race. The exact and entire experience of an individual now is unlike in many respects the experience of his contemporaries; how much more is it unlike the experiences of men in different ages of the world, and in different stages of its development.

It does not follow because the tawny son of the tropics has never seen the earth whitened with snow, that the Laplander has not seen it; neither does it follow because we never saw a man raised from the dead, that the apostles did not see it. Again, it is urged that the resurrection is contrary to the immutability of the laws of nature. This argument is of no force, for the resurrection is not to be brought about by the regular action of the laws of cause and effect, but by the supernatural power. ***“Do ye not therefore err,”*** said Christ to the Sadducees, ***“because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?”*** ***“Why should it be thought incredible with you,”*** says Paul, ***“that God should raise the dead?”*** It is a provision of a supernatural plan coming down upon nature, and entering in unity with it, into the unity of God’s grand system, embracing the material, immaterial, and moral.

Another objection is, the resurrection of the dead is an impossibility, because this body continually changes its substances, so that the bodies we now have are not the same we had a few years ago, nor will the same a few years hence – that the bodies in which we have sinned or acted righteously may not be in many instances the same bodies as those which will be actually rewarded and punished. This argument contradicts the infidel’s own theory of the seat of personal identity, transferring the ego from the soul, the only true subject of reward and punishment, to the body, which is rewarded and punished simply as the instrument.

Such an argument would liberate in a few years every criminal in the world. Why retain a man in prison longer than the time afforded by this supposition for a perfect and entire change of the substance of his body? Know you not at the expiration of the hypothetical number of seven years that he is immaculate unless he sinned during his imprisonment? That there is not a particle of that guilty body which was incarcerated? Open your state prisons and penitentiaries, and let their hordes out upon society; they are innocent. The same argument would so affect the proceedings of our criminal courts, that judge and jury would have to exercise great care to know how much of the guilty body was arraigned at the bar, if any in order to mete out the ends of justice.

Such an argument, though popular and common, contradicts common sense, the common consciousness and experience of mankind. Again, it would appeal with equal force against the resurrection of Christ. His body, according to this hypothesis, changed several times, at least four times. Yet what body did he bring up? This brings us to the true and scriptural answer to the objection – the same body he laid down in the grave.

We have an evidence of the resurrection of the human body in the resurrection of Christ. ***“Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.” “If Christ ... rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen” (1 Cor. 15:12, 13).*** The resurrection of the race follows naturally from the resurrection of Christ. This is clear from the federal representative nature of Christ. The relations He sustains from His federal representative nature to Adam proves it. If Adam in his representative character brought death into the world by his fall, and died himself, it is reasonable that Christ, in His representative character, should by His life, death, and resurrection bring life into the world. The relation He sustains from His federal representative nature to us proves it. Being our second federal Head, and Heaven-appointed Prototype, and that He did take upon Himself a human body, and resumed that body after it had lain in the grave, exalted it to Heaven, changed and glorified, is powerful evidence that our bodies too shall be raised, changed, and glorified, and dwell with His forever.

Again, if it was necessary for Christ, to complete the plan of salvation, to be raised from the dead, it is also necessary, to complete the execution of the plan, that man also should be raised, and furthermore if He was able to raise Himself, He is able to raise others. Such is the argument of Paul, hence he adduces as his principal evidence the fact that Jesus rose from the dead. His resurrection is the type of ours. Part of our nature is in Heaven; the exaltation of a part argues the exaltation of the whole. The Great Head of the church has gone up, and the body must follow. He is, as the apostle expresses it, ***“The first-fruits of them that slept.”***

The Jews were commanded to cut the first ripening grain of their fields and take it to Jerusalem, and lay it upon the altar as a pledge of the coming harvest and as a thank offering to God. At the end of the harvest they all again met at Jerusalem to celebrate the harvest feast; which they did with sacrifices and thanksgiving for many days. Now Christ the “first fruits” lays upon God’s altar in Heaven, as a pledge of that glorious harvest at the end of the world, which will leave every old tomb tenantless, and gather us all, soul and body both, redeemed and glorified into Heaven. The scheme of human redemption necessarily embraces the resurrection of the human body. Its provisions extend to the body, as well as to the soul.

Hear the Scriptures: ***“Ye are not your own,”*** but are ***“bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:19, 20.)*** Both body and soul are God’s. Both bought by the blood of Jesus. Surely a body bought by the blood of Christ, especially when that body has been the sanctified temple of the Holy Ghost, cannot perish forever. ***“We... [wait] for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body” (Rom. 8:23.) “I am the resurrection and the life,”*** Christ exclaims. No mistaking His meaning, for he is speaking with reference to Lazarus. Peter and John ***“preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead” (Acts 4:2.)*** If through Christ, it is embraced in redemption. Christ ***“hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” (2 Tim. 1:10.)***

I love you. Amen.