

TEACHING GOAL

To study the doctrines concerned with the great resurrection of the dead and the judgment of people at the last day.

DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

- Q. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?
- A. At the resurrection, believers being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.

S.C. 38, L.C. 87-89 W.C. of F. XXXII, Savoy 31, Young 144

SCRIPTURAL BASIS

Study Passage: I Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

Support Passages: Titus 2:13-14, I Corinthians 15:51ff,
I Corinthians 6:2ff, Daniel 12:2-3,
Hebrews 9:28, Job 19:26-27

BIBLE STORY

Matthew 25:31-46; the sheep and the goats.

.MEMORY ASSIGNMENT

"Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:17, ESV)

APPLICATION

In view of the blessed hope of Christ's coming and the comfort seen in the resurrection of our bodies, let us be all the more zealous for Christ's kingdom and laws.

SUMMARY

There are a number of interesting issues connected with the resurrection of the body. First of all, is the body that died actually involved with the resurrection? Consider that after death, the body returns to the dust from which it was made.¹ Some bodies were burned up, others were put into the sea, yet others fearfully mutilated. Notwithstanding the Bible teaches that these very bodies will be raised on the last day, joined to their spirits and then will stand judgment by Christ. Those who are alive at Christ's appearing will similarly be changed, receiving immortal bodies as all the rest and will be judged. However these who are alive at Christ's coming will not precede those who are dead.² Therefore they will not receive special treatment but take their place with the rest.

Job clearly asserts the resurrection. He states, "And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!" (Job 19:26-27, ESV) Daniel states, "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." (Daniel 12:2, ESV) Thus we are to understand that the bodies of the just and the unjust that died will be raised in the resurrection. Paul's arguments in I Corinthians 15 and I Thessalonians 4 bear out this assertion as well. The raised bodies will be altered to possess several important features.

1. They will never die again.
2. They will not reproduce.³
3. They will possess knowledge of things now seen darkly.⁴
4. The elect of God will enjoy a bliss and nearness to God hitherto unknown.
5. The wicked will be cast forever into the lake of fire, an estate far more terrible than their souls hitherto have experienced in Hades.

Another feature of the resurrection is that it occurs on the last day. There will not be several resurrections but one only. Revelation 20 refers to the "first resurrection" and in parallel with the "second death" implies that a second resurrection exists. The first resurrection, however, is a spiritual one. It is the new birth.⁵ The implied second resurrection is the resurrection of the body on the last day. Aside from Revelation 20 there is no other mention in scripture to more than one resurrection.

Immediately following the resurrection is the judgment variously described in Matthew 25:31-46, 13:36-50 and Revelation 20:11-15. These passages are typical of many others and they all refer to one judgment. It is not the goal of this brief summary of Christian doctrine to analyze the various divergent views of eschatology, rather it is to present the viewpoint of the Westminster divines which we believe to be the viewpoint of God as it is found in the Scriptures. There we find that the Christian is to look forward to one general resurrection and judgment of both the just and the unjust, but why must the saints be judged?

The Apostle says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." (2 Corinthians 5:10, ESV) The Christian will be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the judgment. He has sinned but he will be acquitted because the righteousness of Christ was imputed to him. He was fully pardoned by God's sovereign act of mercy. (See Year 1 Numbers 48 and 49 on Justification) Furthermore, this passage bears out our former assertion that the bodies of the dead will be present at the judgment.

The second coming of Christ surely is the "blessed hope"⁶ of the Christian, but Paul instructs us to comfort ourselves with the hope of the resurrection of our bodies.⁷ With these eternal verities in view, should we not be moved to greater service to Jesus? We are "aliens and strangers" to this earth, but we are to prevail against Hell's gates. Let us therefore be zealous for the laws of King Jesus. Let us dominate this earth for Christ.

¹ Ecclesiastes 12:7

² I Thessalonians 4:15

³ Matthew 22:30

⁴ I Corinthians 13:9-10

⁵ II Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 2:5-6

⁶ Titus 2:13

⁷ I Thessalonians 4:11-18