

“THE HOPE OF RESURRECTION”

(Things to Come No. 97. July, 1902 Vol. IX. No. 1, by E. W. Bullinger.)

There is no article of the Christian Faith that has been more affected and injured by tradition than the hope of Resurrection. Notwithstanding the fact that there is no truth more important or more fundamental to the Gospel, there is none more neglected. It is difficult to find a hymn in any book which we can sing concerning this blessed hope. We can find hymns about Christ’s resurrection, plenty about “Easter,” but how few concerning the blessed fact that His people, who died with Him, have risen also in Him: how few about “the resurrection of the body,” in which all profess to believe!

In nothing do we see the truth of Isa. LV:8 more exemplified:

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord”

Thus does the Structure emphasise the difference between “my” and “your”: between God’s thoughts and ways, and those of man. God, in His Word, makes everything of resurrection: man makes nothing of it.

God makes resurrection our blessed hope: man makes death our hope, and most of his hymns testify to the truth of our indictment. If we do get a good hymn, it is generally spoiled by the last verse; for most hymns, like man who makes them, end with death.

God speaks of death as an enemy—“the last enemy” Man speaks of death as though it were a friend. God speaks of death as an end. Man speaks of it as a new beginning. God speaks of it as a terminus. Man speaks of it as a “door” or a “gate.”

Christianity ends in the Resurrection and Rapture of the Church of God at His coming. Religion ends in dreams, imaginations, and speculations as to the intermediate state. The Word of God tells of glorious realities, and bodies like Christ’s own risen body. “Incorruption,” “glory,” and “power” characterise our risen bodies (1 Cor. xv. 42-43). Man has nothing better to talk about than “ghosts,” “spirits,” and “spooks.”

The Holy Spirit says “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life” (Rom. vi. 23). “Deceiving spirits and teachings of demons” say “there is no death,” and talk of having “passed on,” and about the “home, going” and “the great beyond,” and “beyond the Veil,” &c., &c.

And the sad fact is that the majority believe man rather than God; and “lying spirits” rather than “the Holy Spirit.”

All resurrection depends on the resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. xv. 13-17). But the teachings of Tradition are all apart from Christ. They shut out Christ. They ignore, Christ's finished work, and they are silent as to Christ's coming again.

As one of the most glorious of the "things to come" it shall ever be our aim and delight to dwell upon the blessed theme—the glorious hope of resurrection; and leave others to fit it in as best they may with their traditions.

Others may be governed by men and their traditions; by evil spirits and their "teachings;" but "our seat-of-government is in heaven, from whence also we look (and are waiting) for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change (i.e., change the essential form, chap. ii. 7) the body of our humiliation, that it may be like (in outward appearance) the body of his glory (i.e., His own glorious body) according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself" (Phil. iii. 20, 21).

This is how our glorious hope is presented to us. We are to look out for it; we are to wait for the wondrous transformation of these poor human bodies. The great promise is given, and held out to us, that one day—at His coming—our bodies will be made like Christ's own glorious body. Infinite power is going to be put forth to accomplish this.

What a blessed hope! It surely becomes us to enquire What is Christ's glorious body like? Because, if we can find out anything about that, we shall, so far, know what our own bodies are to be like. "Like Him" is the promise in 1 John iii. 2; and "Like unto His glorious body" is repeated in Phil. iii. 21.

His body when raised from the dead could eat and drink (See Luke xxiv. 43; Acts x. 41; and compare Matt. xxvi. 27; Mark xiv.25; Luke xxii. 16, 18). It was His own body, not another's. He showed them His hands and His side. The print of the nails and the mark of the spear could be seen. The Lord Jesus did literally rise from the dead; and, in the body in which His people saw Him we may see our own; for, "we shall be like Him."

That body was adapted for heaven as well as for earth: and for earth as well as for heaven. It was independent of all "natural laws." It was above them, and not constrained by them. It was super-natural, or above nature.

These bodies of ours daily suffer from the working of "natural laws"; but then we shall be above them and beyond their constraining power. We shall be in no danger from storm or lightning, drought or flood, heat or cold. We shall be able to walk the earth and talk with men; and yet be able to ascend into the skies. This is what is called "the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. viii. 21). Men cry and strive for liberty in this corruptible flesh; but they know not what real liberty is; and never will till "this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality" (1 Cor. xv. 53, 54).

Yes, we shall be “like Him”: seeing as He sees; hearing as He hears; going as He goes; doing as He does.

Now, our bodies and our bodily senses are limited in every direction.

SOUND is caused by vibrations of the air. But our ears and hearing are limited, and cannot detect a sound below 16 vibrations of air in a second, or above 40,000. Yet it can be demonstrated that there are sounds above these, though we cannot hear them.

LIGHT is caused by vibrations of the ether which is in the air; but these are billions and trillions in a second, compared with the tens and hundreds, of air, which produce sound. The fact is, our eyes are limited, not only as to distance, but as to power. They cannot see the colours of the prism below the red rays (which are about 400 billions of vibrations of ether in a second); or above the violet rays (which are about 750 billions). Yet there are vibrations of ether below the red rays which, though they are invisible, can be felt. These are the heat rays (about 100 billions of vibrations of the ether in a second). And there are vibrations of the ether above the violet rays. These, for want of a name, are designated by the letter “ X,” and called “ X rays.” They can neither be seen nor felt; but they can be discerned only by their actinic or chemical effects (as in photography).

But, we shall be beyond all limitations then. “We shall see Him as He is,” and be “like Him.” Even now, God has only to “open our eyes,” and things are seen that were before invisible. Elisha said of his servant, “ Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha” (2 Kings vi. 17).

And our eyes need only one touch from the Almighty Creator to remove all the present limitations of these vile bodies; and enable us to see new orders of things, the conception of which has never entered the human mind.

Yes, our resurrection bodies will have knowledge beyond all the mere dreamings of earthly wisdom, and will be able to pierce the present mysteries of Creation. They will find out something of what it means as they read of the fulness of joy at His right hand, and pleasures for evermore (Ps. xvi. 11).

Our hope is set upon Him (1 John iii. 3, R.V.). And having been made one with Him in Crucifixion, we shall, be one with Him in Resurrection, Ascension, and coming glory...

Oh, how different is the revelation of God from all the speculations and traditions of man. Man guesses, and dreams, and imagines, and thinks; but he does not know, and can not know, anything of this great subject apart from what God has revealed.

Here, we have, in Scripture, facts and realities; supernatural, but, nevertheless, real; facts which set our feet on the rock of everlasting truth, unmoved by all the vapourings of man's traditions.

In 1 Cor. xv. we learn all that can be known about the fact of Resurrection. The grain of wheat is used by the Holy Spirit to illustrate it. There is a mysterious connection between the old, which passes away; and the new, which springs out of the old.

The new grain of wheat has the form, colour, taste, properties, and likeness of wheat. It is not barley or oats. It is "its own body." So it will be with the mortal body of the child of God. The living identity will be reproduced in a new immortal body. We cannot understand the mystery; but we believe it. Once know "the Scriptures and the power of God" (Matt. xxii. 29), and all is easy to faith. "God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him." This answers all our questions, solves all difficulties, and resolves all our doubts.

It is entirely a matter of Revelation. But that is the very thing that man will not have. The Lord combatted this opposition in the Pharisees and Sadducees. Paul met with it in the Epicureans and Platonists and Stoics. We meet with it to-day in Infidelity and Spiritism; yes, and in the Traditionalism of the churches, which is more akin to Spiritism than to Revelation.

Thousands of Christians know nothing of this blessed hope of Resurrection. They have no place for it in their creed. They forestall it by another hope which they have substituted for it. They put on their tombstones— "Death is swallowed up in Victory"; notwithstanding it is clearly stated, "THEN (i.e., in Resurrection) shall be brought to pass this saying that is written." And, "He is not here"; notwithstanding the fact that these words were spoken of the risen Christ, who had left the Tomb.

So perverse is Tradition, and so diverse from God's written Word.

Oh! to rest on the realities of Divine revelation; to be content with them; yea, to be satisfied with them. To hope for that on which His word has "caused us to hope"; and to wait for that which He has promised.

As we write these words, it all seems so beautiful and glorious, that we wonder how we can ever settle down to contemplate any other subject. And we marvel that Christians can listen to, or entertain for a moment, the vain imaginations of Tradition, when God has set before us the grand realities of Resurrection in "the world to come."

This it is that glorifies Christ; for it shuts us up to Him. If He be not raised, then there is no resurrection at all. And if we are to rise, it is only when He shall descend into the air and accomplish the mighty work. "SO," and only "So shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. iv. 17).

This word “so” defines for us the basis of all true "comfort"; hence, it is added, "wherefore comfort one another with these words." But these are not the words with which most Christians, to-day, “comfort one another." The majority find no comfort in them.

True comfort, and that which makes present affliction light and its duration seem but for a moment,” is only "WHILE we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things that are not seen: for the things that are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

And what are the “eternal” things which have this wonderful transmuting power of making heavy afflictions "light,” and long years "a moment”?

The one that is immediately mentioned is Resurrection; and the blessed hope is set forth in the verses that follow (2 Cor. v. 1-8). We give them in full in the translation of Conybeare and Howson, with their notes, as they so beautifully exhibit the precious truth set forth in this scripture. Moreover, their words will furnish an independent support of our teaching.

“Yea, I know that if the tent which is my earthly house be destroyed, I have a mansion built by God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens. And herein I groan with earnest longings, desiring to cover my earthly raiment with the robes of my heavenly mansion (if indeed I shall be found still clad in my fleshly garment). For we who are dwelling in the tent groan and are burdened; not desiring to put off our [earthly] clothing, but to put over it [our heavenly] raiment, that this our dying nature might be swallowed up by life. And He who has prepared me for this very end is God, who has given me the Spirit as the earnest of my hope. Therefore I am ever of good courage, knowing that while my home is in the body I am in banishment from the Lord (for I walk by faith, not by sight). Yea, my heart fails me not, but I would gladly suffer banishment from the body, and have my home with Christ. Therefore I strive earnestly that whether in banishment or at home, I may be pleasing in His sight.”

But tradition alters all this. It changes the whole scope of the passage by picking out four of the words from the A.V.; joining them with four other words, and then using them in the very opposite sense, as though the subject treated of were Death instead of Resurrection. It quotes them thus: "Absent from the body, present with the Lord." But this is not what is written. Resurrection is the theme; and this precious truth concerning it is put in two ways:—

(1) What we know; and (2) What we desire.

(1) We know that while we are in the earthly house of this tabernacle, we are not clothed upon with our house (or body) which is from heaven” (vv. 6 and 1), and are thus "absent from the Lord.”

(2) We desire to be absent from the earthly house of this tabernacle, and to be clothed upon with our heavenly house or body, because then we shall be present with the Lord.”

To pick out and divide asunder those eight words from their context is, to say the least, garbling the words of God, and comes perilously near what is censured in the immediate context (2 Cor. iv. 2).

We might with equal justice quote the words "hang all the law and the prophets," and leave out "on these two commandments" (Matt. xxii. 0); or say "there is no God," and leave out "The fool hath said in his heart" (Ps. liii. 1);; or say, "Ye shall not drink wine,"! and leave out "Ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but [ye shall not drink wine] of them" (Amos v. 11); or talk about "the restitution of all things," and leave out "which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets" (Acts iv. 2 1).

All these partial quotations are correct so far as the Text is concerned, but what about the Context?

The context is, "We are confident, I say, and **willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord** " (v. 8).

By omitting the words which we have printed in thicker type, the sense is entirely changed. "The body" in both verses is explained, in verse 1 to be "our earthly house of this tabernacle;" and being "present (or at home with) the Lord" is explained in verse 2 as being "clothed upon with our house which is from heaven." The Apostle distinctly says, on the one hand, that he did not wish to die (v. 4, "not that we would be unclothed "); and on the other hand, he was not merely "willing rather" but "earnestly desiring to be clothed upon" (v. 2). The popular quotation of these words is worthy of the tradition which it is used to support, when it seeks to make them prove the very opposite of what the whole context teaches.

We bring this solemn impeachment of misquotation against all who thus handle the Word of God.

We exhort our readers to believe God instead of Spiritists; that so they may be "earnestly desiring to be clothed upon" with that glorious heavenly, spiritual body, "our house which is from heaven." It is to be ours when we shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, SO to be ever "present with the Lord."