

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

Correspondence.

ST. PAUL'S DOCTRINE OF RESURRECTION.

To the Editor of the CHURCHMAN.

SIR,—I cordially agree with Mr. Routh in thanking Mr. Ford for his able and thoughtful paper on the Resurrection. The questions raised by him are in many minds, and are all the better for careful and reverent ventilation.

Perhaps we need to remind ourselves that in the Gospels we have simply the record of testimony to the fact, in its historic aspect, that the Lord Who was crucified had risen, and that His body was real, though changed. This was sufficient for the first disciples; they were assured of His risen life, and rejoiced. No explanation is attempted in the Gospels.

St. Paul shows in his Epistles that he had carefully considered the fact of Christ's resurrection in the light of the Christian hope, and also in view of those who doubted or objected to that doctrine. His preaching at Athens was of Jesus and the resurrection hope. He knew that heathen thought in his day considered that any existence after death was of a vague and shadowy kind, and of a lower stage as compared with the present life of man. He knew also that the Christian hope, founded on the resurrection of our Lord, revealed that, to the Christian, the life beyond was a larger and more perfected and glorious existence than the present. He faced the objections which might be urged against that blessed hope. In 1 Cor. xv. we have his clear statement that the body of the resurrection is not the same body which is laid in the grave, though mysteriously possessing a link or nexus with it. He uses an illustration drawn from Nature, in the history of the seed, and concludes that in the case of man the body which is of the earth, earthy, passes away, and that the body which abides is heavenly and spiritual, and in harmony with its new environment. This present corruptible body, he asserts, cannot inherit the state of incorruption. He asserts also that a mysterious and essential change will be wrought on the bodies of those who are alive and remain at the last great crisis in the consummation of the age—a change which shall make them equal to those who have already passed through physical death. Thus, according to St. Paul's teaching, at death this body of humiliation is past and done with, and that the Christian after death possesses a new and glorious body resembling in character the body of the Lord in glory.

The question may be reverently asked, Where lies the nexus linking the mortal body, "the earthly house of this tabernacle," with the spiritual body, "the building from God, not made with hands," eternal in the heavenly and spiritual regions? Are we obliged to think of the "heavenly body" as something prepared independently and apart from our living and essential selves, and brought to us as a garment to be put on? Surely not. It is life that forms the organism. It is life which is building up our present bodies ever in process of renewal. If the law be universally true that life expresses itself in the organism it forms, why may we not believe that even now, in this life, and under the veil of this mortal body, there is being

evolved "the body that shall be"? and that when we have "shuffled off this mortal coil," we shall pass into that new and higher life with a body already fitted for its new activities?

This thought is in full harmony with the seed and plant illustration of St. Paul in 1 Cor. xv. Nature also presents us with still closer analogies in the life-history of the dragon-fly, the butterfly, etc. These, in their earlier stages of existence, have bodies adapted to their mode of life at that stage, yet during this period there is being formed a new body with new powers, which at a later stage is liberated and becomes the fitting expression of a higher and more perfect existence.

The pre-natal existence of man also affords illustration of the individual life evolving organs for use only in the life that is to follow. If, therefore, our life reaches beyond the grave, as we confidently believe, it is reasonable to believe also that the body suited to that higher stage is in process of preparation and evolution.

Thus we catch a glimpse of what may be the true nexus between the "natural body" of this present life and the "spiritual body," which is fitted for the "life of the world to come." Bishop Westcott, in his "Gospel of the Resurrection," speaking of death, says we conceive of it as interrupting the union of the body with the soul, "though perhaps quite wrongly." These added words suggest the doubt in his own mind as to the correctness of the ordinary conception of death.

Again, he reminds us that "there is nothing unnatural in supposing the power which preserves man's personality . . . in moulding the continuous changes of his present material body, will preserve his personality hereafter by still acting according to the same law in moulding the new element out of which a future body may be fashioned." He believes that "after death the soul will continue to act through an organization which is itself the expression of the same law as moulds all that we now call our body." He sees in the resurrection-body of Christ "not an extension of an existence with which we are acquainted, but the manifestation of an existence for which we hope."

There must, therefore, be mysteries in connection with our Lord's resurrection which are not to be resolved by our present knowledge of things unseen. The fact that His sacred body saw no corruption may well illustrate the words of St. Paul when he speaks of "mortality being swallowed up" or absorbed of life (2 Cor. v. 6), and of "this mortal putting on immortality." The mystery of the change from His body of humiliation to the body of His glory has not been revealed. It is beyond our present powers, and must be reverently left. We may not be able yet to harmonize all the several aspects of the resurrection into one perfect conception, but we believe that every fragment of truth has its own place in the perfect whole which one day will be revealed. Let us be willing to advance to a more perfect apprehension of the truth as light may be given upon the several aspects of the great fact of our Lord's resurrection and of the teaching of His great apostle St. Paul.

W. JEFFREY THOMPSON.