

## 2. THIS MORTAL MUST PUT ON IMMORTALITY

Once we come into the proper Scriptural understanding of death, we will come to appreciate how absolutely essential it is for believers, and ultimately all mankind, to be changed, or as Paul declared, for this corruption to put on *incorruption* and this mortal to put on *immortality*. For those who have trusted in Christ, this will occur in the twinkling of an eye in the presence of the Lord at the end of our present eon. Whether we have fallen asleep (dead) in Jesus or are alive and remain at His presence (coming), we will be *transfigured* into the body of His glory, for when He is manifested or revealed, we shall be like Him.

*Incorruption* means to be beyond decay, that is, to have a body that no longer is subject to decay. *Immortality* means to be beyond death, that is, to be in a body like our Lord's that is no longer subject to the power of death. *Transfigured* means to be changed in form or appearance, that is, to be like Him. Let us be reminded that we are *new creations in Christ* (2 Corinthians 5.17; Galatians 6.15), and as new creations our destiny is grounded in all is new (Revelation 21.5).

This is our hope or expectation. Our hope is not *in* death. <sup>1</sup> *The dead know nothing whatsoever* (Ecclesiastes 9.5) sums up the whole matter of death. Death is the last great enemy of mankind and only in the One who is the Resurrection and the Life will mankind ultimately come out of death, never to face it or be held by its power again, for we know that the One having raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also by means of Jesus and will present us all together, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing (see 2 Corinthians 4.14; Ephesians 5.27).

Although death is more like sleep, it still is not something that is looked upon favorably, nor is it something to be glorified or immortalized. Death is associated with evil (Deuteronomy 30.15, 19) and is an enemy (1 Corinthians 15.26); God has no pleasure in the death of those who die (Ezekiel 18.32); death is surrounded with sorrows (Psalm 116.3) and terrors (Psalm 18.4; 55.4). The dead know nothing, but the ones they leave behind are often left grieving and lonely.

Our hope is not *in* death and “going to heaven” (or, for others to go “to hell”) in some temporary body or even as a bodiless spirit, as some would have us believe. Some confuse the matter further by declaring that the soul goes to heaven or to hell. <sup>2</sup> What is the source of this error? It is founded on the lie of the serpent of old: “*You surely will not die*” (Genesis 3.4). In other words, the big lie is that man's soul is immortal. If it is immortal, then it can never die even *in* death; therefore, it must go to some place to live *in* death. This lie has been incorporated into pagan myths and fables, or what could be called pagan theology, which has infiltrated the

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<sup>1</sup> *In* death is used throughout this writing to stress the fact that, when one dies, he or she is *in* the state of death, not in a state of life, that is, some other form of life.

<sup>2</sup> The soul is the result of the union of the spirit of life and the body, and does not exist apart from the two.

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theology of Christendom to the point that the lie of Satan is preached from many of the pulpits of Christendom.

Without doubt, teaching on what happens to the dead, both those who die in Christ and those who do not, runs the gamut to the point of confusion. However, all confusion is cleared up if we follow what Scripture teaches and not hold to doctrines of demons. It is rather simple; all the dead are *in* death. The body of the dead returns to the soil from whence it came; the soul, which cannot exist apart from the body and the spirit, returns to the unseen from whence it came; and the spirit of life returns to God from whence it came (see Job 10.9; 34.15; Psalm 16.10; 30.3; 35.7; 38.17; 49.14, 15; 86.13; 89.48; 146.3-4; Ecclesiastes 3.19-20; 12.5-7). All the dead or asleep in Christ have no knowledge. They simply are in a state of death, which is likened to sleep, awaiting the shout of the Lord Himself and the blast of the trumpet of God to awaken them from sleep as the One who has conquered death descends *out of* heaven (see 1 Thessalonians 4.13-17). One-thousand years later, the rest of the dead will be raised to face the great white throne judgment (see Revelation 20.5, 11-15). While in the state of death no one is in heaven or in a fictitious place called hell.

**If we do not understand the true nature of death, we will not understand and appreciate the true nature of the glory of the resurrection, transfiguration and immortality.**

Let it be indelibly etched into our minds and written on our hearts that man is not immortal and, as such, does not possess a soul that is immortal. We must put off mortality and put on immortality, which places us forever beyond the power of death. The only way to achieve immortality is through the resurrection from [among] the dead and the transfiguration into the glory of His [Jesus'] body, which only comes about when our Savior comes *out of* heaven to rescue us from death. This is the Scriptural expectation of every true believer. Thus, the Scriptural order of our expectation is first *resurrection* (if we fall asleep in Jesus), and then *transfiguration* into His likeness, which makes us immortal.

Can you imagine anything more glorious than the moment when *all* the conquering saints in Christ stand up from the grave and, along with *all* the conquering saints in Christ that are alive and remain, walk together on this earth and then rise to meet the Lord? What a cloud of witnesses! What glory!

In order for us to clearly understand this matter, there are four foundational truths that must be stressed.

***Death is lording over Him no longer.***

Now if we died together with Christ, we believe that we shall be living together with Him also, having perceived that **Christ, being roused from among the dead, is no longer dying. Death is lording it over Him**

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**no longer**, for in that He died, He died to Sin once for all time, yet in that He is living, He is living to God. (Romans 6.8-10 cv)

*First*, it must be stressed that Christ was roused from among the dead and that death has no more power over Him. He has conquered death or is beyond death, never to be subjected to it again. In other words, He has immortality. If we do not start with this truth, then we have no foundation upon which to build.

### ***Christ alone has immortality.***

He is King of kings and Lord of lords, **Who alone has immortality**, making His home in light inaccessible, Whom not one of mankind perceived nor can be perceiving, to Whom be honor and might eonian! Amen! (1 Timothy 6.15b-16 cv)

*Second*, it must be stressed that, as the King of kings and Lord of lords, Christ *alone* has immortality. We need to be reminded that Paul penned these words many years after Calvary. By this time, a definite, but unknown, number had been resurrected, including those raised up by Jesus and His apostles. In this context, Paul declared that Christ *alone* has immortality. Do you grasp the truth declared by Paul? No one else, not even the ones who had been resurrected, had immortality in Paul's day. Has anything changed since then or in our day to reverse this truth? No! All the ones that were resurrected are dead, and today all the dead are dead, for they know nothing whatsoever.

This one truth—*Who alone has immortality*—should settle the whole issue of where the dead are today. Christ, the second Man, alone is beyond death; to date, no one from among mankind has moved beyond death.

### ***I am the Way!***

“Let not your heart be disturbed. Believe in God, and believe in Me. In My Father's house are many abodes; yet if not I would have told you, for I am going to make ready a place for you. And if I should be going and making ready a place for you, **I am coming again and I will be taking you along to Myself**, that where I am, you also may be. And where I am going you are aware, and of the way you are aware.” Thomas is saying to Him, “Lord, we are not aware whither Thou art going, and how can we be aware of the way?” Jesus is saying to him, “**I am the Way** and the Truth and the Life. No one is coming to the Father except through Me.” (John 14.1-6 cv)

*Third*, it must be stressed that Jesus is the Way in all respects of death and life. He is the only way out of death and into immortal life. In fact, His resurrection is the pattern for our resurrection. All others who have died and were resurrected were raised to mortal life, not to immortal life. When their days came to an end they simply returned to death.

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These words spoken by Jesus to His disciples are often used to preach that when a believer dies he or she immediately goes to heaven to live in heavenly mansions. I have stressed elsewhere that this is not according to Scripture, so it will not be repeated here. However, it is needful to understand that the emphasis of Jesus' words is on Him coming again and taking His disciples along to Himself, implying that they would be with Him at some future time. As a side note, Jesus also implied that He would return to them soon in the form of the spirit of God that would be sent to them when He was glorified after His resurrection and ascension.

Thomas, in particular, was puzzled by what Jesus stated and acknowledged that he did not understand the way that Jesus was going. Simply, he did not know where Jesus was going and the way in which He would get there. Please understand that Jesus was not establishing a doctrine of going to heaven, living in mansions and walking on streets of gold, as some preach.

Jesus was declaring that He is the Way to life and that His way to life was through the death of the cross and the resurrection from among the dead. Thomas did not understand this truth until Jesus revealed His nail scarred hands and side to Thomas after He was resurrected and before His final ascension to the throne of God (John 20.26-29). Only then could Thomas declare: "*My Sovereign and my Elohim!*" (John 20.28 TSS). However, Thomas was not alone in his doubt, for the other disciples did not understand that the Way to life was through the death of the cross either (see Mark 9.32).

Consequently, Jesus' death and resurrection are our pattern for life as well. We must go the same way that He went. I am *the Way, the Resurrection and the Life* (John 11.25) sum up the heart of the matter. Whether we are speaking of spiritual life or immortal life, the only way to achieve either is through death and resurrection life, and this is only achieved through the One who has conquered death and now possesses immortal life. He is the Way!

### ***Christ Jesus abolishes death.***

You may not be ashamed, then, of the testimony of our Lord, nor yet of me, His prisoner, but suffer evil with the evangel in accord with the power of God, Who saves us and calls us with a holy calling, not in accord with our acts, but in accord with His own purpose and the grace which is given to us in Christ Jesus before times eonian, yet now is being manifested through the advent of our Saviour, **Christ Jesus, Who, indeed, abolishes death, yet illuminates life and incorruption through the evangel** of which I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher of the nations. (2 Timothy 1.8-11 cv)

Fourth, it must be stressed that Christ Jesus abolishes death. Some translations state that He *abolished*, but *abolishes* is the more accurate verb tense. He conquered death when He was roused from among the dead, but He also abolishes death because, as Paul taught the Corinthians, Christ must be reigning until He

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should be placing all His enemies under His feet and the last enemy is abolished, that is, death (1 Corinthians 15.25-26 *cv*). In other words, abolishing death is something that continues until the consummation of the eons. Scripture reveals that the first resurrection will lead to the conquering, blessed and holy saints being the first to move beyond death (Revelation 20.4-6).

Through the evangel entrusted to Paul, life and incorruption are illuminated or brought to light in Christ. With the word *incorruption*, Paul introduced another facet of the hope of the dead in Christ that leads to immortality. *Incorruption* is not quite the same as *immortality*, for *incorruption* means “incapable of corruption.” The word *corruptible*, the adjective form of *corruption*, means “subject to decay.” The human body, which is a body of death, is corruptible, which means it is subject to decay. However, it is recorded that Jesus’ body did not see corruption when it was wrapped in linen and placed in the tomb for three days. It is quite different for all mankind. When all of us die, our bodies remain in the grave beyond three days, at which time decay sets in until all flesh is consumed; therefore, no one, not even believers, is beyond the corruption of the body brought on by death. Simply, all decay and return to the soil.

There is only one way to overcome corruption and that begins with resurrection.

### ***Resurrection.***

Death is the enemy of every living person and the only thing that can reverse death is resurrection or being roused from the state of being dead. Death is not merely the enemy of our body but of our entire being (the person), for the dead (the person) know nothing whatsoever.

As Peter declared to the sons of Israel after Christ had ascended back to His Father: “*Men, brothers! It is possible [for me] to speak with confidence to you concerning the patriarch David, that he both came to the end [of his life] and was buried, and his tomb is with us until this day. ... For David did not ascend into the heavens*” (Acts 2.29, 34 ALT). Notice that it is David the person, whose life ended, went into the tomb, and did not ascend into the heavens. David awaits the resurrection just like all the other dead saints, before and after Calvary.

Now, resurrection reverses what took place at death. The Greek word for *resurrection* is *anastasis*, which means “up-standing,” implying that the body will stand up. Following the concordant approach to translation, *resurrection* refers to the body standing up from death, *rousing*<sup>3</sup> refers to the soul awakening as from sleep, and *vivification*<sup>4</sup> refers to the return of the spirit. Which comes first is most likely similar to how Adam was created. The body is formed, the spirit enters the

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<sup>3</sup> The Greek word for *rouse* is *egeirō*. References to the dead being roused include Matthew 10.8; 11.5; Luke 7.22; 1 Corinthians 15.13, 16, 29, 32, 35, 42, 43, 44, 52.

<sup>4</sup> The Greek word for *vivify* is *zōopoieō*, which means “live-do” or “make alive.” References include John 5.21; 6.63; Romans 4.17; 8.11; 1 Corinthians 15.22, 36, 45; 2 Corinthians 3.6; Galatians 3.21; 1 Timothy 6.13; 1 Peter 3.18.

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body to give it life, and the soul is awakened once there is life in the body. However, instead of being a living soul in a soilish and soulish body, the resurrected saint, as a new creation in Christ, will be roused a spiritual body, wearing the image of the Celestial One (see 1 Corinthians 15.42-49 cv).

Paul clearly explained the process to the believers in Rome: *Now if **the spirit of Him Who rouses Jesus from among the dead** is making its home in you, He Who rouses Christ Jesus from among the dead will also be **vivifying your mortal bodies because of His spirit making its home in you*** (Romans 8.11 cv).

Notice how Paul stressed that it is the spirit that makes the body alive, which means that resurrection is totally dependent on the spirit of God. For the believer, the whole process will take place in the twinkling of an eye, which is pretty fast, so the order of the change really does not matter. What matters is that it only comes because of His spirit, and when it does come, we will *all* be changed.

It is needful to be reminded that resurrection was not a new idea that surfaced with Calvary; it is a major tenet of Scripture.

Job saw ahead to the day in which he would be resurrected. *“As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and **at the last He will take His stand on the earth**. Even after my skin is destroyed, **yet from my flesh I shall see God; whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes shall see and not another. My heart faints within me!**”* (Job 19.25-27 NASB). He has waited in silence and unconsciousness a long time, but his day may be coming soon.

Consider the words of two Hebrew prophets.

Thy **dead shall come to life again, my dead body they shall arise**, awake and shout for joy, ye that dwell in the dust, for a dew of light is thy dew, and earth to the shades shall give birth. (Isaiah 26.19 REB)

“From those sleeping in the soil of the ground **many shall awake**, these to eonian life and these to reproach for eonian repulsion.” (Daniel 12.2 cv) <sup>5</sup>

Or, consider the words of the Lord Jesus Himself.

Marvel not at this, for coming is the hour in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and those who do good shall go out into **a resurrection of life**, yet those who commit bad things, into **a resurrection of judging**. (John 5.28-29 cv)

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<sup>5</sup> Eonian life refers to life in the oncoming eons.

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And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at **the resurrection of the righteous.**” (Luke 14.12-14 NASB)

And, answering, Jesus said to them, “The sons of this eon are marrying and are taking out in marriage. Yet **those deemed worthy to happen upon that eon** and **the resurrection from among the dead** are neither marrying nor taking out in marriage. For neither can they still be dying, for they are equal to messengers, and are the sons of God, **being sons of the resurrection.**” (Luke 20.34-36 cv)

Consider Jesus’ response to Martha who, like some of the Jews of her day, knew that there is a future resurrection.

Jesus is saying to her, “Your brother will be rising.” Martha is saying to Him, “I am aware that he will be **rising in the resurrection in the last day.**” Jesus said to her, “**I am the Resurrection and the Life.** He who is believing in Me, even if he should be dying, shall be living. And everyone who is living and believing in Me, should by no means be dying for the eon. Are you believing this?” (John 11.23-26 cv)

Notice that Jesus first declared that He is the Resurrection and the Life. Believing in Him does not mean that the person bypasses death, for He went on to acknowledge that such a one dies, but the believer will not be dying for the eon. In other words, the believer will have eonian life or life in the oncoming eon. How will the believer achieve such life? There is only one way and that is through resurrection that will lead to immortal life, as well as eonian life; life in the eon to come.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, received revelation directly from the Lord about the resurrection. He was encouraged by the Thessalonians who were waiting for His Son out of the heavens (1 Thessalonians 1.10 cv). He encouraged their hearts when they were concerned over the fate of their dead loved ones (died believing on Jesus). Thus, he taught them what the risen Lord had revealed to him about the resurrection of those asleep in Christ and the snatching away to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4.13-18). Later, in writing to the Corinthians, Paul went to great lengths to defend the resurrection of Christ, as well as the believer’s resurrection.

For **if the dead are not raised not even Christ hath been raised;** and if Christ hath not been raised to no purpose is your faith, yet are ye in your sins! Hence also **they who are fallen asleep in Christ are lost:** if in this life in Christ we have hoped—and that is all we are of all men most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15.16-19 REB)

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Paul retorted with the truth!

But now hath **Christ been raised from among the dead,—a firstfruit of them who have fallen asleep**; for since indeed through a man came death through a man also cometh the raising of the dead; for just as in Adam all die so also in the Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own rank (class): a firstfruit Christ, after that they who are the Christ's in his Presence,—afterwards the end (consummation)—whenever he delivereth up the kingdom unto his God and Father. (1 Corinthians 15.20-24 REB)

Christ is the firstfruit of all that have fallen asleep, which means that other fruit must follow Him into life. In fact, according to Paul, **in Adam all die and in Christ shall all be made alive**. Who can dispute that all mankind die? All mankind is born of Adam's race and all die. This is indisputable. But the good news is that just as all mankind is in Adam, so will all mankind be in Christ, and *in* Christ shall all be made alive; that is, all mankind shall one day be made alive as well. This will not occur all at once, for mankind is divided into classes or ranks (anointed firstfruits, those who are His in His presence, and the remainder of mankind at the consummation of the eons). Each will be made alive in their own class and in their own era or proper time (see 1 Timothy 2.6).

Finally, John, the beloved apostle, was given great revelation of Christ and the final days of this eon as Christ takes the scepter of the kingdom over this earth and reigns for a thousand years. Near the closing of the vision given on Patmos, John perceived thrones and saw the saints who will have a part in the first or former resurrection and who will reign on earth as priests of God and of Christ.

Blessed and holy is he that hath part in **the first resurrection**: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. (Revelation 20.6 KJV)

Happy and holy is he who is having part in **the former resurrection!**<sup>6</sup> Over these the second death has no jurisdiction, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will be reigning with Him the thousand years. (Revelation 20.6 cv)

Unfortunately, the resurrection has become a secondary, if not totally ignored or lost tenet (teaching, doctrine) throughout Christendom. As in Paul's day, there are some who even deny that there will be a resurrection (2 Timothy 2.18), and others make it *entirely* a spiritual happening that occurs in the life of the believer. In

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<sup>6</sup> The words *first* and *former* are translated from the Greek word *proton*, which means "beforemost." In other words, this resurrection occurs before other resurrections. As used in John's Revelation, it is contrasted with the resurrection that will occur about 1,000 years later; thus, it is first or former to the resurrection of the great and small that will appear before the great white throne. The use of the word *former* does not exclude the possibility that there are other resurrections that precede it.

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either case, a literal and physical resurrection that brings about the redemption of the body is denied (Romans 8.23).

Why the avoidance or ignorance of the resurrection? Perhaps there are many reasons for this, but one answer lies in the unfortunate view of death, which places the believer in a blissful life *in* death (i.e., immediately upon death). After all, if *in* death one does not really die but goes into the glory of heaven, of what value is resurrection to the believer? With this thinking, the resurrection becomes something secondary, even meaningless, so there is no reason to teach about it.

A pastor-teacher, who has a world-wide radio and Internet ministry, recently told his audience that when believers die, they immediately receive a body in heaven. Again, this begs for an answer to the question: If this is true, then of what value is the resurrection to all who are asleep in Christ? Well, this pastor has no problem with this question, for he also has believers receiving another body in the resurrection. But what value is it to receive another body in the resurrection (third one, if you are counting) if dead saints already have lived in new bodies for however long they supposedly have been in heaven? This defies logic and, most of all, is not discovered in Scripture. The only way one could possibly accept such a thought is to believe that once believers die, they are immediately resurrected, which is, in fact, what some teach. Again, no such teaching is discovered in Scripture. Paul proclaimed that *we will not all sleep* (that is, die, for some will be alive and remain to the presence of the Lord), *but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed* (1 Corinthians 15.51-52 NASB). The fact that some are dead and some are alive when the trumpet sounds indicates a future event. Thus, Paul placed this grand event at a moment in time, not every time a saint dies.

Another reason for the loss of the greatness of resurrection to the believer is the thought that the resurrection only involves the body. Such thinking can easily lead to the mistaken idea that the soul is immortal *in* death. It also can lead to the misunderstanding that resurrection (or, perhaps immortality) is not out of death but out of some other form of life in some other place. It is true that resurrection is about the redemption of the body, but resurrection is about more than the body because a body must have spirit to come alive. But let us be clear that mankind was created as spirit, soul and body (1 Thessalonians 5.23). Take one of these components away, especially the body and the spirit, and we cease to exist (die) as God created us to be. Put them all back together and we are made alive as God created us to be.

Paul referred to the deliverance of our body from the slavery of corruption and death (see Romans 8.18-25 *cv*). In the resurrection, our bodies of death will be conformed to the body of His glory. They must be transfigured if they are to put on immortality. However, a body has no life without the spirit of life breathed into it (Genesis 2.7; James 2.26). The spirit, which in death returned to God who gave it in the first place (Ecclesiastes 12.7), must return to the body. But when it returns, it

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will bring about a major change in our constitution. As Paul wrote, it is sown a soulish body, but it will be roused a spiritual body. “The first man, Adam, became a living soul;” the last Adam a vivifying Spirit. The first man was out of the earth, soilish; the second Man is the Lord out of heaven. We will be wearing the image of the Celestial (see 1 Corinthians 15.45-49 cv). The resurrection, rousing, vivification and transfiguration will truly bring forth a new creation in Christ.

Now, many might agree with the matter of the body and the spirit; however, the soul is seen in an entirely different light. The soul is often viewed as a distinct part of man that can operate separately from the body and spirit, and because of this thinking many hold that the soul departs into some other place to live *in* death. I realize that people do not state it this way; but this is what their thinking means, regardless of their words. However, the soul has no life apart from the body and the spirit.

Dear brethren, if you have fallen prey to the orthodoxy of Christendom, come out of it and seek the Lord to open the eyes of your heart to understand and come into the true joy of your destiny.

A true bona fide death of the whole person must take place, and a true bona fide resurrection and vivification of the whole person is essential to overcome death, and this is all in the power of the One who is *the Way, the Resurrection and the Life*.

### ***The two resurrections.***

Before moving on to the transfiguration, we need to see that there are at least two *major* resurrections that occur about 1,000 years apart. In his Patmos vision, John reveals that there is a first or former resurrection (Revelation 20.4-6), and then 1,000 years later there is another resurrection, which could be called the second or general resurrection (Revelation 20.11-15). If the first one is the former resurrection, then the second one is the latter resurrection.

As we look at this topic, there are varying views on who participates in which resurrection and even when the resurrections occur. In what follows, I offer some thoughts on the matter as I see Scripture, recognizing that with most, if not all, interpretation of Scripture, there are gaps in our understanding. I often say that it seems we can get about 90% of the way in our understanding, but there always seems to be another 10% that remains elusive to our understanding. Perhaps this is by the design of God, as if He has purposely built a tension into Scripture. In the final analysis, whichever view one holds, what matters most is that, as believers, we seek to be ones who, by His grace, faith and love, overwhelmingly conqueror through Christ who loves us (Romans 8.37).

To understand these two resurrections, it is best to start with the second or latter one. The fact of the matter is that the Jews in Jesus' day expected a general

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resurrection. We see this expectation in Martha's response to Jesus regarding her brother's death.

Jesus is saying to her, "Your brother will be rising." Martha is saying to Him, "I am aware that he will be **rising in the resurrection in the last day.**" Jesus said to her, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. (John 11.23-25 cv)

For Martha, the last day referred to when there will be a general resurrection of all the dead. Jesus Himself referred to this day.

Marvel not at this, **for coming is the hour** in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and those **who do good** shall go out into a **resurrection of life**, yet those **who commit bad things**, into a **resurrection of judging**. (John 5.28-29 cv)

Paul also referred to this hour in his defense before Felix the governor.

But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be **a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust**. (Acts 24.14-45 KJV)

Both Jesus and Paul concur that there is a resurrection of ones who do good, *the just*, and a resurrection of the ones who do bad things, *the unjust*.

Most commentators see these as two resurrections separated by 1,000 years; that is, *the resurrection of life* is the *first resurrection*, and *the resurrection of judging* is the *second resurrection*. Perhaps there is another way to look at this. Jesus said that coming is *the hour*, which is a figurative way of expressing a short period of time having a common characteristic. A search of Scripture will reveal that *hour* is used in this manner in most cases, which would mean that *the hour* would not indicate a millennial gap between the two. Jesus declared that all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, which seems to indicate that all at once will hear it. Paul referred to it as a resurrection, as if there is one resurrection that raises the just and the unjust. This is also the same resurrection that was revealed to Daniel (Daniel 12.2).

Consequently, it is more likely that Jesus and Paul (and what was revealed to Daniel) referred to one resurrection occurring at the same time; and it is the second resurrection that John saw in his Patmos vision that occurs at the end of the millennial kingdom that leads to the new day when all is new. This is the great white throne judgment, when the great and the small appear before Christ as the Judge of all.

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Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, **the great and the small**, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is **the book of life**; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. (Revelation 20.11-12 NASB)

Interestingly, Job referred to the small and the great in death, and wondered why he had not joined them in death when he was first born.

**“Why did I not die at birth**, come forth from the womb and expire? **The small and the great are there....**” (Job 3.11, 19 NASB)

### *Book of life.*

Many commentators assume that when the book of life is opened, no one's name of those standing before the throne will be recorded in the book, and that it is opened only for verification of this alleged fact. Thus, they conclude that all will be judged and cast into the lake of fire. I too thought this way, but upon further study, I have some doubts that we can make such an assumption.

It is more likely that the book of life is opened because the ones having done good, *the just*, and the ones having done bad things, *the unjust*, will be standing before the great white throne, and the book will be used to separate the two groups. The just (believers) will be resurrected to immortal life and enter *God's day* as His people (**resurrection of life**). The unjust (unbelievers) will be resurrected to face the judgment of the lake of fire with the purpose of chastening and cleansing them, so that they too will have immortal life, either during God's day, or at the consummation of the eons when death is abolished forever (**resurrection of judging**).

But the question arises as to why the just would appear before the great white throne and not be resurrected in the first resurrection 1,000 years prior? Are they not saved? Yes; they are saved. First, during the Kingdom Age, birth and death will be operative, and it is quite possible that some of the just will die during this period. Second, these are believers that lived before the Kingdom Age that failed to conquer while in their bodies of humiliation, and because of this, they are chastised along with the unbelievers. We see an illustration of this in Jesus' parable on the faithful and unfaithful stewards or servants.

And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath. But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; the lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and **will cut him**

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**in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.**

(Luke 12.42-46 KJV)

The unfaithful servant in this parable is contrasted with an unbeliever, which means that the unfaithful one must be a believer.

To add further clarity to this, we must understand the character of the first resurrection, and to do this we need to turn to Paul.

***Out-resurrection, first resurrection, better resurrection.***

In order that I might come to know Him in an experiential way, and to come to know experientially the power of His resurrection and a joint-participation in His sufferings, being brought to the place where my life will radiate His likeness to His death, if by any means I might arrive at the goal, namely, **the out-resurrection from among those who are dead.** (Philippians 3.10-11 WAET)

Truly, Paul desired above all things to live as if he were radiating the very life of Christ in his body, even in suffering and death. Paul's desire was based on a goal set before him; it was to arrive at what he called the *out-resurrection*, which comes from the Greek word *exanastasis*. This is the only place in Greek Scripture that this particular word is discovered. Unfortunately, practically all versions of Scripture simply translate it as *resurrection*.

Before looking at this word, it is important to see that Scripture uses two expressions in relation to resurrection. The first expression is *the resurrection of the dead* (e.g., Matthew 22.31; Acts 17.32; 23.6; 24.21, 13; Hebrews 6.2), which to most Jews referred to a general resurrection of the good (just) and the bad (unjust). According to their understanding, a day would come when all would be resurrected and judged. We discover this in the three disciples' response to Jesus' order as He came down the mountain after being transfigured. This leads to the second expression—*rising from the dead* or *resurrection from the dead*.

As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until **the Son of Man rose from the dead. They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant.** (Mark 9.9-10 NASB)

As Israelites, the disciples knew that all the dead would be resurrected as expressed in *the resurrection of the dead*, but they did not understand that there would be a *resurrection from the dead*. In other words, not only did they not understand that Jesus, as the Son of Man, was to die on the cross, but that He would also be raised from the dead. There is only one other place in the Gospels that this expression is used; it is used in reference to Jesus raising his friend Lazarus from the dead (John 12.1, 9). Thus, the expression *the resurrection from the dead* refers to a select group that is resurrected out from among all the dead

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while the rest remain dead. Notice how Paul used both expressions in his defense of resurrection.

Now if Christ is preached, that He has been **raised from the dead**, how do some among you say that there is no **resurrection of the dead**? (1 Corinthians 15.12 NASB)

Out of twenty-two references in Greek Scripture to being *raised from the dead*, twenty-one of them refer to Jesus (John 2.22; 12.1, 9; 21.14; Acts 3.15, 4.10, 13.30, 34; Romans 4.24; 6.4, 9; 7.4; 8.11; 10.9; 1 Corinthians 15.12, 20; Galatians 1.1; Ephesians 1.20; Colossians 2.12; 1 Thessalonians 1.10; 1 Peter 1.21), and one refers to Lazarus (John 12.17). Out of seven references in Greek Scripture to *the resurrection from the dead*, five refer to Jesus (Acts 14.2; 26.23; Romans 1.4; 1 Corinthians 15.12; 1 Peter 1.3) and two refer to man (Luke 20.35; Philippians 3.11). The Luke reference is particularly telling.

Jesus said to them, “The sons of this age [eon] marry and are given in marriage, but **those who are considered worthy to attain to that age [eon] and the resurrection from the dead**, neither marry nor are given in marriage; for they cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being **sons of the resurrection**. (Luke 20.34-36 NASB [CV])

The point in all this is that there are only two main expressions in Scripture related to the resurrection, one of which almost exclusively is used in reference to Jesus being raised or resurrected **from** the dead. The CV adds the word *among* to this expression—*raised* or *resurrected from among the dead*—to make it more emphatic. This expression lays the foundation for the fact that some will also be resurrected from among the dead at some future time.

Now, returning to the goal that Paul sought to attain; he did not merely use the expression *resurrection from the dead*, but he added something to it.

If by any means I might arrive at the goal, namely, **the out-resurrection [exanastasis] from among those who are dead**. (Philippians 3.11 WAET) <sup>7</sup>

*Exanastasis* is made up of two words. It is comprised of *anastasis*, which means “standing up again.” This is the most commonly used word in Greek Scripture to refer to the resurrection. However, Paul added the prefix *ex*, which “denotes origin or the point from whence motion or action proceeds, or out of a place, time or cause.” It can mean “out among,” which seems to be the most appropriate meaning to Paul’s goal. The Concordant Greek Text, English Sublinear, translates this expression as “out-up-standing of the out-of-dead-ones.”

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<sup>7</sup> Other translations use the expression *resurrection from the dead* (NASB), *resurrection of the dead* (KJV) and *resurrection out of the dead* (LITV).

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Thus, Paul sought to stand up again from among the dead. In other words, Paul saw a resurrection in which only some will stand up; others will remain dead. Obviously, this cannot refer to the general resurrection of the just and the unjust, for they all will stand up at the same time, in the same hour.

Having been a devout Pharisee, Paul knew that all the dead will be resurrected one day. As we have seen, he knew of the second resurrection, but this was not Paul's goal. He sought to arrive at or to attain to a very special goal. *Attain* (Greek *katantao*) means "to arrive at." In other words, Paul's goal was to one day arrive at the resurrection *from* the dead, the same resurrection that his Lord had attained. In desiring to die as his Lord died, Paul was seeking to rise from among the dead just as the Lord rose as the firstfruit of those who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15.20).

We could say that Paul sought for a *firstfruit resurrection* that he called *the out-resurrection*. How do we know that there is a firstfruit resurrection? Because Paul tells us so!

But now hath Christ been raised from among the dead,— [1] **a firstfruit of them who have fallen asleep**; for since indeed through a man came death through a man also cometh the raising of the dead; for just as in Adam all die so also **in the Christ shall all be made alive**. But each in his own rank (class): [2] **a firstfruit Christ**, [3] **after that they who are the Christ's in his Presence**,—[4] **afterwards the end** (consummation)—whenever he delivereth up the kingdom unto his God and Father. (1 Corinthians 15.20-24 REB [numbers added by writer])

The numbers have been added in these verses to highlight four different groups or classes. The first thing that we need to see is that Christ is in a class all by Himself, for He is a firstfruit of them who have fallen asleep ([1] in above verse), that is, the dead. Christ alone has immortality. In Adam **all die**. However, the good news is that in Christ **shall all be made alive**, but not all at the same time; there is an order to their resurrection. Paul gives us this order, and it starts with a class that is also a firstfruit.

Now, most commentators see a *firstfruit Christ* ([2] in above verse) in one of two ways. Some see this as referring to those who were resurrected after Jesus rose from the dead. This group was raised to mortal life; thus, they died again and did not enter immortal life. Some see this as referring to Christ Himself. I disagree with both views.

If we follow Paul's logic, we discover that *each in his own order* refers back to *in Christ shall all be made alive*. In other words, it refers to all mankind that die, not to Christ Himself. It only follows that if Christ Himself is a firstfruit, then there are other firstfruits to follow. During harvest time the farmer does not pick just one piece of fruit and considers it is his firstfruits; rather, he harvests a group of fruit that he considers his firstfruits.

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According to the English Sublinear of the Concordant Greek Text, the first group that Paul lists is simply “firstfruit anointed.” The word *Christ* can also be translated as the word *anointed*. Thus, the first group could be called “anointed firstfruits.” We could say that the cream of the crop is resurrected first from among mankind. There will be a group of believers that will be counted worthy to attain to the oncoming eon to reign with Christ; they are sons of the resurrection (Luke 20.34-36).

I believe that this is the *out-resurrection* to which Paul sought to attain. It is the *first* or *former* resurrection that John saw in his Patmos vision and the *better* resurrection that is accounted to the ones who gained approval through their faith but did not receive what was promised (Hebrews 11.39).

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them, and the souls of the ones having been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and who did not prostrate themselves in worship before the beast nor his image and did not receive the mark on forehead and on their hand. And **they lived and reigned with Christ [for] thousand years**. And the rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years are completed. This [is] **the first resurrection**. Happy and holy [is] the one having a part in **the first resurrection**; over these the second death does not have power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and **they will reign with Him [for] a thousand years**. (Revelation 20.4-6 ALT)

Happy and holy are those who participate in the first resurrection, for they will reign with Christ for a thousand years. The second death will have no power over them. This group is made up of believers **only**, which is a vital point to our discussion. Unbelievers have no part in this resurrection and some, perhaps many, believers will be excluded as well. Only ones found worthy of the oncoming eon are the sons of the resurrection; they are the only ones in the first resurrection. In other words, it will take more than being justified (the just) to be in the first resurrection; one must be a conqueror. The rest of the dead, which includes the just not deemed worthy of the next eon and the unjust, must remain dead for a thousand years. They will miss receiving an inheritance in the coming kingdom of Christ.

Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, **so that they might obtain a better resurrection**; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these, **having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect**. (Hebrews 11.35-40 NASB)

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The ones who will be considered worthy of the *first* or *better* resurrection, the *out-resurrection*, are ones who will have conquered while they lived in their bodies of death. How will they have conquered? They will have conquered through grace, faith and love. Hebrews 11 lists the many that walked by faith and conquered in their day. Paul declared: *We are more than conquering through Him Who loves us* (Romans 8.37 *cv*). How do we conquer? We do it through love—love for our God and Savior, love for one another, and love for our enemies. If we love, we also forgive, including our enemies that do us much harm, for this is what we are commanded to do (Matthew 5.44; 6.14). If we want to be in the out-resurrection, then we must love and forgive, and this is done by laying down our lives, even unto death if necessary.

**They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not love their lives in the face of death.** (Revelation 12.11 *HCSB*)

These are the ones who overwhelmingly conquer through the One Who loves us, and who will be priests of God and of Christ that will reign with Christ for 1,000 years.

Well, much could be written about conquering, but we must press on.

The second group to be resurrected is the rest of mankind that must appear in the presence of Christ ([3] in above verse). If the *firstfruits resurrection* is the *first resurrection*, and this occurs at the end of our present eon, then this resurrection must occur 1,000 years later. It is the second resurrection of the just and the unjust, when most of mankind must stand in the presence of the Judge. In other words, this group includes believers (the just) that were not included in the first resurrection or out-resurrection. The just will have believed in Jesus but did not conquer through His life; thus, they were not anointed firstfruits. They will be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Corinthians 3.15), and they will enter into immortality. The unbelievers (the unjust) will be cast in the lake of fire and will not enter immortality at this time. They will be brought in at the end or perhaps before ([4] in above verse).

Paul declared *then comes the end*. A more literal rendering is *thereafter the consummation*. In other words, at the consummation of the eons, the rest of mankind that did not receive the benefit of immortality from the second resurrection must be transfigured into immortal life when death is abolished. I do not see these ones going through a third bodily resurrection, because they were resurrected to appear at the great white throne judgment. What they require is immortality, but to receive this, they must be chastened and purified in the lake of fire, which represents God's divine law, the standard by which their sin and works will be judged. To me, brought back to life to live in mortal bodies for an undetermined time is chastisement enough, especially as they will see that others are immortal, living in glorified bodies. They will enter into a second type of death (not physical and definitely not for torture) that is designed to purify them, so that one day they too can enter into

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immortality. If they are not brought out of this second death, then it cannot be declared that death is abolished, and Christ will not have accomplished the work given to Him by His Father; and thus, His work of the cross will have been a failure.

But how do we know that the unjust one day will be resurrected to life? We know it because Paul declared that Christ must reign until He has subjected all things to Himself. The ones being subjected to Christ are the unjust or the wicked, unrighteous.

For **HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET**. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15.27-28 NASB)

In other words, His purpose of reigning is to subject all things in heaven and on earth to Himself, so that He can then subject all things, including Himself, to His Father, so that God may be *All* in all. Notice that the mission of the Son of God is not to destroy all things but to subject all things, *for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them* (Luke 9.56 NASB). It is not His purpose to destroy or annihilate the unjust, but to subject them, so that the word of God, which does not return void, is fulfilled.

For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus **EVERY KNEE WILL BOW**, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that **every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord**, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2.9-11 NASB; also Isaiah 45.23)

Notice that every knee and every tongue will be involved with this declaration. *Every* means *all*!

Jesus declared: "Now is [the] judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. "And I, **if I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw** [or, drag] all to Myself." (John 12.31-32 ALT)

Truly, Jesus must judge the world and subject all to Himself, and He will do this, even if He must **drag** all to Himself. This is the meaning of *drawing all*. Jesus will not fail to drag all mankind to Himself, and this must include the unjust that will be purified in a second type of death, the lake of fire, so that in Christ shall all be made alive. To God be all the praise, honor and glory!

Once we are clear on the resurrection, we need to be clear that resurrection in itself does not lead to immortality. A transfiguration or dramatic change of the person must take place in order to become immortal.

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### *Transfiguration—we shall all be changed.*

Behold, I show you a mystery [secret]; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For **this corruptible must put on incorruption**, and **this mortal must put on immortality**. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. (1 Corinthians 15.51-54 KJV [CV])

Paul brought the entire matter of incorruption and immortality to an apex in his defense of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. In his first epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul comforted their hearts that their dead loved ones would not miss the presence of the Lord, for they would be raised from among the dead and snatched away with brethren in Christ who will be alive and remain on earth on that glorious day (1 Thessalonians 4.13-18). Paul wrote of this same event in the above verses that not all will sleep or die, which reiterates the fact that when Christ comes there will be believers alive on earth that consequently will never experience the unconsciousness of death. However, Paul revealed a mystery or secret (something hidden in the past but now revealed) to the Corinthians that was not made clear to the Thessalonians—*we shall all be changed*; that is, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, *all* the dead brethren and *all* the alive brethren shall *all* be changed.

Now, notice to whom Paul referred when he used the word *incorruptible*. The dead shall be raised incorruptible. Why just the dead and not the alive ones? The answer lies in the fact that only the dead see corruption or decay of the body. The ones who are alive and remain may have experienced the slow process of dying in their bodies, but they will never see corruption; this only comes when the life of the body departs. When the dead are roused, they will move beyond decay or corruption. For this reason, Paul first declared that the change occurs with the dead as they put off corruption and put on incorruption.

Next, Paul declared that the change is from mortality to immortality. *Mortality* means “being subjected to death”; therefore, *immortality* means “not being subjected to death.”<sup>8</sup> <sup>9</sup> *Immortality* comes from the Greek word *athanasia*, which means “un-death” or “deathlessness.”

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<sup>8</sup> Experts in the language claim that in Hebrew Scripture there is no word for *mortal* or *immortality*. In Greek Scripture, the word *immortality* is used only three times (1 Timothy 6.16; 1 Corinthians 15.53, 54). The King James Version incorrectly translates *immortality* for the word *incorruption* in two places (Romans 2.7; 2 Timothy 1.10). The word for *incorruption* is incorrectly translated *immortal* one time (1 Timothy 1.17).

<sup>9</sup> Although the word *immortality* is mentioned only three times, there are other Scriptures that indicate a future immortality (see Luke 20.34-36; John 5.28-29; 1 Corinthians 15.22-28; 2 Corinthians 5.1-4; 2 Timothy 1.8-11).

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First, the dead move beyond corruption (decay), and then they, along with those who are alive and remain, *together* move beyond death. It is then that death is swallowed up in victory and that Christ will no longer be the only one who has immortality. The ecclesia, which is His body, will be immortal as He is, for we know that when He is revealed, we (the body) shall be like Him (1 John 3.2 NKJ), for He will transfigure the body of our humiliation, to conform it to the body of His glory (Philippians 3.21 cv). Christ loves His body as a husband is to love his wife as his own body. When Christ comes again, *He should be presenting to Himself a glorious ecclesia, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that it may be holy and flawless* (Ephesians 5.27-28 cv).

We put on immortality after the resurrection of the last trump and in the twinkling of an eye! No one, except Christ, has immortality until then, contrary to the teaching of so many in our day.

If after the cross of Calvary those who died in Christ had immortality, then Paul could not have boldly claimed that Christ alone has immortality. Scripture cannot conflict with itself, and likewise, Paul's teaching cannot conflict with itself. In Paul's day and in our day, there is only one who has immortality; meaning that throughout the 6,000 years of known human history, there are no humans who are beyond death, which must include Enoch and Elijah. According to God's word, David (the person) is deceased and still in his tomb, and he did not ascend into the heavens (see Acts 2.29; 34 cv). Daniel was encouraged: *But thou go thy way to the end,—and thou shalt rest, and shalt rise to thy lot at the end of the days* (Daniel 12.13 REB). At the end of his life, Paul told Timothy that his dissolution or death was imminent (2 Timothy 4.6). He did not say that his incorruption or immortality was imminent. He was about to die, to be dissolved.

This mortal must put on immortality. This glorious change is totally dependent on Christ who is the Resurrection and the Life, and the resurrection of the saints that will occur in the presence of the Lord at the end of our present eon.

As stated earlier, the resurrections that occurred while Jesus walked this earth, and later occurred on the day He was resurrected, and also later occurred through His apostles shortly thereafter, did not lead to immortality for any of the ones who were resurrected. Even Lazarus, who Jesus called forth from the tomb after four days, did not become immortal, for according to history he died. He, along with all the others, undoubtedly died again, for they were raised to mortal life, which meant that they were still subject to corruption.

Now, this is based on two points. First, as already stressed, the word of God declares that today there is only One who has immortality. To date, only one resurrection has led to immortality of one Person. Second, resurrection must be followed by a transfiguration or change of the person into the likeness of Christ. There is no Scriptural evidence that those who were resurrected at Jesus' first coming or any who have been resurrected since, even to this day, have become like

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Christ.<sup>10</sup> To this latter point, I have read that in our day resurrections of the dead are occurring. I am not going to offer a judgment on whether this is in fact true, but I have not read of any case in which the resurrected person was changed into the likeness of Christ; that is, the person was transfigured into the body of His glory. Surely, if this were occurring in our day, then it would be blasted across the media that these people are totally different from any humans walking on the face of the earth today.

### ***Logic demands.***

Before moving on, there is another point to be made regarding the illogical and unscriptural view of death held by many. According to many preachers, the only difference between dead unbelievers and dead believers is where they go *in* death and what they face in these places. On the one hand, the dead unbeliever supposedly goes to a place called *hell*, which is like an eternal oven that torments the so-called *lost soul* with fire, worms and every imaginable torture. On the other hand, the dead believer goes to heaven to be in the presence of God and to walk on golden streets and enjoy the eternal bliss of glory. Whether those who hold this view state so or not, the logical conclusion of such teaching is that the dead unbelievers and the dead believers are all beyond death.

Think about it; neither truly dies in the sense of Scripture but merely enters another form of life, one that is good and one that is bad. However, if both never truly die, then it only follows that both are beyond death as well. Perhaps some will counter this by declaring that being beyond death refers to the body alone, and since neither has a resurrected body, technically, they are not beyond death. But logic demands that if neither truly dies, then both must be beyond death, unless one redefines death as something other than death, which is what most do who hold this view; whether they admit it or not.

If this leaves your head spinning trying to make any logical sense out of all of this, then you are not alone because it leaves my head spinning as well. As I see it, such erroneous teaching leads to immortality being treated just like resurrection; both are generally ignored, except perhaps at funerals.

### ***Conformed to the body of His glory.***

It cannot be stressed enough that immortality only comes with being transfigured into the likeness of Christ or, as Paul wrote to the Romans, conformed to the image of God's Son (Romans 8.29). Immortality is found *in* Christ, and our way into immortality is *in* Christ.

Paul encouraged the Philippians that a great change is coming for those who are waiting for the Lord to come out of heaven.

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<sup>10</sup> Some commentators refer to these events as *resuscitations* and not resurrections, in acknowledgement that the ones raised did not put on immortality, but eventually died again.

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For our realm is inherent in the heavens, out of which we are awaiting a Saviour also, the Lord, Jesus Christ, **Who will transfigure the body of our humiliation, to conform it to the body of His glory**, in accord with the operation which enables Him even to subject all to Himself. (Philippians 3.20-21 CV)

And Paul reminded the Colossians: *Be disposed to that which is above, not to that on the earth, for you died, and your life is hid together with Christ in God. Whenever Christ, our Life, should be manifested [revealed], then **you also shall be manifested [revealed] together with Him in glory*** (Colossians 3.2-4 CV [ALT]).

When will Christ be manifested or revealed? Not at the death of the believer, but after His people are transfigured and He [Christ] comes out of heaven. But Paul was not alone in this expectation, for John also declared the expectation for believers when Christ is revealed.

Beloved, we are now children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we will be. But we know that when it [or, He] shall be revealed, **we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is!** And every one having this hope [or, confident expectation] in Him, purifies himself, just as that One is pure. (1 John 3.2-3 ALT)

Even David, the man after God's heart (Acts 13.22), had a similar expectation: *As for me, I shall behold Your face in righteousness; I will be satisfied with **Your likeness** [form] **when I awake*** [i.e., in resurrection]. (Psalm 17.15 NASB).

Studying Scripture will unveil one undeniable fact—the hope or expectation given for the dead *in* Christ begins with the resurrection **from among** the dead that leads to the presence of the Lord. Those resurrected **from among** the dead and those alive and remain to the presence of the Lord will be changed in the twinkling of an eye; that is, all will be transfigured. It is at this point that this mortal will put on immortality.

### ***Unveiled glory.***

There are two sets of Scripture that give us a prophetic view of the coming of the kingdom of Christ and the transfiguration of those who turn to the Lord. The first set pertains to Moses and the sons of Israel being summoned to Mount Sinai and the appearance of the glory of the Lord on the seventh day. The second set pertains to Jesus when He was transfigured on the mountain in the presence of three of His disciples. Moses is a type of Christ, and Christ is a type of the conquering saints that will be counted worthy of the coming eon.

Then Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. **The glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses**

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**from the midst of the cloud.** And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top. Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights. (Exodus 24.15-18 NASB)

“For **the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father** with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see **the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.**” **Six days later** Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and **led them up on a high mountain** by themselves. (Matthew 16.27-28; 17.1 NASB)

And **He was transfigured** before them; and **His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.** (Matthew 17.2 NASB)

As Christ is our pattern of resurrection so is He our pattern of transfiguration.

In a prophetic view of the Son of Man coming in His kingdom and the glory of His Father, six days later, presumably on the seventh day, just as the glory of the Lord appeared to Moses on the seventh day, Jesus took His disciples up to a high mountain and was transfigured in their sight. In Scripture, *mountain* typifies a *kingdom*. *Seven* is a number of divine perfection and refers to the sabbath rest that comes after six days of work. In the restoration of this earth, Elohim rested on the seventh day. Thus, after 6 days (6,000 years) on the seventh day (7<sup>th</sup> millennium), the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Revelation 11.15).

While Jesus walked this earth as a Man, His glory was veiled to all around Him. Undoubtedly, He had the treasure of glory hidden within His earthen vessel. On the mountain His glory broke forth; it was unveiled before the eyes of the three disciples. It was such an amazing sight that they truly did not know what to do or how to react, other than to be terrified in their earthly, carnal minds (Mark 9.10).

But there is more to this story than the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. It is also a preview of the glory, which is within every believer, that will break forth in the transfiguration that awaits us. Paul picked up this theme in his second epistle to the Corinthians in which he compared the fading glory of the old covenant as revealed to Moses to the unfading glory of the new covenant in Christ.

For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it. **For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory. Therefore having such a hope,** we use great boldness in our speech, and are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. But their minds were hardened; for until this very

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day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. **But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.** (2 Corinthians 3.10-18 NASB)

Moses had to veil his face, for his glory was fading away; however, for those who believe in the Lord, the veil is taken away, and with unveiled face they behold the glory of the Lord, and in so doing, they are transformed from glory to glory. The glory of the Lord is a glory that will not fade, for it is formed in the one who has turned to the Lord. It is a treasure hidden in earthen vessels.

*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels....* (2 Corinthians 4.7 NASB)

We cannot see this treasure of glory, but by God's word we can be assured that it is being formed in us who believe. We are being transformed into the image of Christ, going from glory to glory. Paul confirmed this fact in his epistle to the Colossians.

The mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is **the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.** (Colossians 1.26-27 NASB)

Christ *in* you and His glory that is being formed in you is truly the treasure. This is the hope and expectation of all who have turned to the Lord.

I believe that the conquerors of Christ will be so full of glory that in His presence they will be like ripe fruit that from their inner man will burst forth glory, for glory will not be able to be contained in that day.

### ***A physical, spiritual, celestial body.***

Now, both Paul and John tell us that in immortality we will be like our Lord, and we have a picture of Christ being transfigured; but what does this mean to those who believe? As we say, what does it look like? Will we have a physical body, or will we be like a spirit without form? The answer is that we will be both. In fact, using Paul's terms, we will have a body that is physical, and that is spiritual and celestial; a body that will be capable of freely moving in and out of the physical and spiritual or celestial realms. The spiritual body in the image of the celestial is clearly presented in Paul's defense of the resurrection.

There are **bodies celestial** as well as bodies terrestrial. But a different glory, indeed, is that of **the celestial**, yet a different that of the terrestrial, another

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glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, for star is excelling star in glory. Thus also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is roused in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is roused in glory. It is sown in infirmity; it is roused in power. It is sown a soulish body; **it is roused a spiritual body**. If there is a soulish body, **there is a spiritual also**. Thus it is written also, The first man, Adam, “became a living soul:” the last Adam a vivifying Spirit. But not first the spiritual, but the soulish, **thereupon the spiritual**. The first man was out of the earth, soilish; **the second Man is the Lord out of heaven**. Such as the soilish one is, such are those also who are soilish, and **such as the Celestial One, such are those also who are celestials**. And according as we wear the image of the soilish, **we should be wearing the image also of the Celestial**. Now this I am averring, brethren, that **flesh and blood is not able to enjoy an allotment in the kingdom of God**, neither is corruption enjoying the allotment of incorruption. (1 Corinthians 15.40-50 cv)

Notice that Paul refers to *spiritual* and *celestial* and declares that flesh and blood cannot enjoy an inheritance or allotment in the kingdom of God.

Before proceeding along this line, it might be helpful to explain the use of the words *spiritual* and *celestial* as used by Paul. He speaks of the Lord out of heaven and then refers to Him as the Celestial One. Most translations do not use the word *celestial*, but rather the word *heavenly*. The Greek word from which *celestial* is translated is *epouranion*, which refers to that part of the universe that is on, or higher than. The concordant method has chosen the word *celestial* to distinguish it from the word *heaven*, which comes from the Greek word *ouranos*. *Heaven* implies what is seen when looking up, and *celestial* implies what is beyond the heavens; thus, it is *higher than*.

At the end of his natural life, Paul wrote Timothy that the Lord will be saving him for His *celestial* (*epouranion*) kingdom (2 Timothy 4.18 cv). Again, most translations call it the *heavenly* kingdom.

So, what does *celestial* actually mean? Is it merely a place further out in the universe, or is it something more than material matter or physical space? To understand the answer, we must step outside our physical box and seek *spiritual* to *spiritual*.

Paul clearly joins the spiritual with the celestial. Consequently, I believe that when he referred to that which is higher than, he was looking to the spiritual realm, which is something far greater than merely a physical location in the vast far reaches of the universe. It is as if Paul looked through the portal that separates the spiritual from the physical and saw that the celestial (or, what most call *heaven*) is actually the spiritual realm of God. (Paul in fact did have an experience that could be viewed as such as recorded in 2 Corinthians 12.2-4). The *celestial* realm is not a location but rather a dimension, the very dimension in which God resides. Those

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who dwell in the celestial realm must be spiritual in nature, for God is spirit. However, we will not be without form, for we will have a spiritual body. We could say that our new body will be a joining of the spiritual and the physical in the way that it was always intended to be for mankind. This is glory!

Further, when the Lord comes out of heaven, it is not as if He will have traveled trillions of light years to get here from some far distant galaxy, which is how many actually view it; but He will merely step through that portal that separates the spiritual and the physical. He is with us today; we await the manifestation of His presence and appearing. As Paul wrote: *For our realm is inherent in the heavens, out of which we are waiting a Savior also, the Lord Jesus Christ* (Philippians 3.20 cv).

Christ as the second Man, the last Adam, is the Lord out of heaven who is the Celestial One, and those who become immortal also will be in His likeness as ones wearing the image of the Celestial. Thus, Paul revealed that the spiritual body is a celestial body, out of the realm of the heavens, which will not be energized by blood. The physical body comes first and then the spiritual; but notice that Paul did not present the physical body and the spiritual body as mutually exclusive, as if once we have a spiritual, celestial body we will not have a physical form or body as well. Once we put on immortality we will have bodies like Jesus that are suited for the physical and spiritual realms. We will be able to walk on the dusty streets of this terrestrial ball called *earth*, and soar among the *celestials*, and throughout God's vast spiritual realm. We will not be hindered by the space-time continuum.

The fact of the matter is that Jesus revealed to His disciples that the resurrected body will have both, for it will have flesh and bone, but evidently not blood. As stated earlier, Christ is our pattern for the resurrection, and He is also our only pattern for our new glorified body.

And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, saying, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon." They began to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread. While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be to you." But **they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit.** And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for **a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.**" And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; and **He took it and ate it before them.** (Luke 24.33-43 NASB)

After He was resurrected, Jesus appeared to His disciples, much to their surprise. They thought they were seeing a spirit, which meant that He would have had no

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bodily or physical form. They thought they were looking at a ghost or an apparition. To prove that He was no such thing but that He, in fact, had a physical body, Jesus directed their eyes to His hands and feet that had been pierced. He then asked for something to eat and ate it in their presence. An apparition could do no such thing, so He proved to them that He had a physical body, one which He described as flesh and bones. Although He manifested Himself in flesh and bones, Jesus also proved that He was not held by the physical world, but that He could freely move into the spiritual realm by appearing and disappearing from among His disciples. He could also change His looks, so that His disciples could not immediately recognize Him as He did on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24.13-35) or on the beach (John 21.4).

### ***Sons of Zadok.***

Perhaps we discover a type of this in the sons of Zadok as presented by Ezekiel.

“But the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of My sanctuary when the sons of Israel went astray from Me, shall come near to Me to minister to Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer Me the fat and the blood,” declares the Lord GOD. “They shall enter My sanctuary; they shall come near to My table to minister to Me and keep My charge. It shall be that when they enter at the gates of the inner court, they shall be clothed with **linen** garments; and **wool** shall not be on them while they are ministering in the gates of the inner court and in the house. Linen turbans shall be on their heads and linen undergarments shall be on their loins; they shall not gird themselves with anything which makes them sweat. When they go out into the outer court, into the outer court to the people, they shall put off their garments in which they have been ministering and lay them in the holy chambers; then they shall put on other garments so that they will not transmit holiness to the people with their garments.” (Ezekiel 44.15-19 NASB)

Prophetically speaking, the sons of Zadok speak of the holy and blessed ones of the first resurrection who will receive immortality and eonian life in the oncoming eon and who will be priests of God and of Christ. But notice how the sons of Zadok are commanded to wear linen when they minister to the Lord in the sanctuary, but when they minister to the people they are to put off their linen and put on other garments made of wool. In other words, in type they must take on different garments, one to be in the presence of the Lord and one to be in the presence of man. In the antitype, the priests of the millennial eon will put on their spiritual form when they enter the spiritual realm to be in the presence of the Lord among the celestials, and they will put on their physical form when they enter the physical world to be in the presence of mortal man.

Can you imagine anything more glorious than to live unhindered in all God’s creation? This is our hope, and it is all based on ***Christ in you, the hope of glory*** (Colossians 1.27). Heaven, as most view it, is not our hope. A glorified,

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immortal body is our hope, to be clothed with our dwelling out of heaven, when this mortal is swallowed up by life (see 2 Corinthians 5.1-4).

I find it very interesting that what has been presented regarding our hope of being transfigured and what it will look like seldom seems to be stressed among those who love the thought of the appearing of the Lord, even among those who want to see Jesus face to face. Instead, the emphasis seems to be entirely on escaping from this world, entering heaven, walking on streets of gold and living in heavenly mansions. The emphasis is often on location and time.

Well-meaning brethren who love Jesus sing of “flying away,” “taking the gospel ship,” “leaving this old world behind,” as if the Lord is only interested in removing His people from this earth, so that they can walk on streets of gold in heaven forever and ever. Forget the billions of people who will be left behind. It is as if many are saying (without actually saying it): “After all, they are ‘going to hell’ anyway, and this is by their own choice, so they deserve what they get.” Oh, we need to repent if we have been deceived into thinking this way.

Never mind that God is love, and He loves this old world created through His Son and loves every person that He has breathed the spirit of life into since Adam was first formed from the soil of the earth. Never mind that God was in Christ **conciliating the world to Himself**, not reckoning their offenses to them (2 Corinthians 5.19 cv)! Never mind that through Christ, **God is reconciling all in the heavens and on the earth to Himself**, making peace through the blood of His cross (Colossians 1.20). Never mind that God’s purpose of the eons is **to save all mankind** because He is the Savior all mankind, especially, *but not exclusively*, of believers (1 Timothy 4.10). Never mind that God has purposed that His Son, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, take the scepter of the kingdom of the heavens and rule over this earth, and permanently establish His Father’s kingdom in all creation. And never mind that God has purposed that the saints are, in fact, called to judge this world and the angels one day (1 Corinthians 6.2, 3). The saints are destined to reign with Christ in both the heavens (among the celestials) **and** on the earth (among the mortals).

So why does it seem that some believers are more interested in leaving this old world behind and the billions who have not come into the light of Christ yet, as if they will never have anything to do with the world once they fly away? To balance out this thought; there are others who see the church and Israel as two separate entities that will be on earth and living alongside each other in Jerusalem during the Messianic kingdom. This is fraught with flaws as well. Regardless of the view held, there is confusion because God’s people lack vision of God’s purpose and plan as revealed through His Son and in the eons made by the Son.

I love the thought of one day being in the presence of the Lord, but I must confess that I have grown weary of the emphasis on what is commonly call *the rapture*, because I believe the emphasis is in the wrong place and reveals a great lack of vision among so many.

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What many call the *rapture* is not about escaping this earth but about coming into God's purpose in His Son, and that is to gather up or sum up all in the heavens and on the earth. It is about a called and chosen people (chosen by the grace of God) being transfigured into the likeness of the beloved Son of God and meeting Him in the air, and then escorting Him to this earth, so that the real business of changing this world into one of righteousness and justice can be done in earnest, so that all mankind will eventually know God is love and be reconciled to God. The Son is on a mission; He has a work to accomplish, and He will do it through His body, which will have no spot or wrinkle. It might make for good singing and happy feelings to sing of walking on streets of gold and living in heavenly mansions, but if we are honest with ourselves, it reveals the self-centeredness that is in the heart of carnal man, and not the sacrificial, self-less love of God. Christ has a work to do in the oncoming eon, and He has a called and chosen vessel that He is preparing to work with Him to bring about God's purpose. Righteousness and justice must be and will be the foundation of the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Psalm 89.14). The nations must hear the evangel of the kingdom and be taught righteousness and disciplined according to God's divine law and His grace.

All of mankind must eventually be brought into the holy of holies, and the spiritual realm must truly become one with the physical realm. To apprehend all this according to God's word takes spiritual sight or vision, something that seems to be in great need in our day.

So, let us briefly look at the presence of the Lord and the so-called *rapture*.

### ***His appearing.***

In his last testament before his martyrdom, Paul wrote to his beloved Timothy that a reward awaited him, not *in* death, but in a future day associated with the appearing of the Lord.

Finally, [there] is laid up for me the victor's wreath [or, crown] of righteousness which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, will give to me **in that Day**, but not only to me, but also to **all the ones having loved His appearing**. (2 Timothy 4.8 ALT)

And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me **on the day of His return**. And the prize is not just for me but for **all who eagerly look forward to His appearing**. (2 Timothy 4.8 NLT)

**In the future** there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me **on that day**; and not only to me, but also to **all who have loved His appearing**. (2 Timothy 4.8 NASB)

The Greek word for *appearing* is *epiphaneia*, which is a special term used by the Greeks for the appearance of the gods. It is variously translated as *advent*,

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*brightness, coming and manifestation*, and is used exclusively by Paul six times (2 Thessalonians 2.8; 1 Timothy 6.14; 2 Timothy 1.10; 4.1, 8; Titus 2.13) to refer to when Christ comes to establish His kingdom on the earth. To Timothy, Paul wrote: *I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom* (2 Timothy 4.1 NASB).

Paul's testimony should clear up any confusion over when believers are rewarded. It is not in death but at the appearing of the Lord, a future day. The question is: Do you eagerly look forward to His appearing?

### ***To the presence of the Lord.***

Greek Scripture uses another word in reference to the coming of the Lord. The Greek word *parousia*, which means "being beside," is translated as *presence or coming*, and is used sixteen times in reference to Christ (Matthew 24.3, 27, 32, 39; 1 Corinthians 15.23; 1 Thessalonians 2.19; 3.13; 4.15, 23; 2 Thessalonians 2.1, 8; James 5.7, 8; 2 Peter 1.16; 3.4; 1 John 2.28). Paul uses this word in his often-quoted passage about the rapture.

Now we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are reposing, lest you may sorrow according as the rest, also, who have no expectation. For, if we are believing that Jesus died and rose, thus also, those who are put to repose, will God, through Jesus, lead forth together with Him. For this we are saying to you by the word of the Lord, that we, the living, who are surviving **to the presence of the Lord**, should by no means outstrip those who are put to repose, for the Lord Himself will be descending from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the Chief Messenger, and with the trumpet of God, and **the dead in Christ shall be rising first...** (1 Thessalonians 4.13-16 cv)

In this verse, *the presence of the Lord* is not the same thing as the Lord appearing for all in the world to see. This is more of a personal encounter with the dead in Christ who will be resurrected and those in Christ who are living at that moment.

Thereupon we, the living who are surviving, shall at the same time be **snatched away** [harpazō] **together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air**. And thus shall we always be together with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4.17 cv)]

All will be transfigured into the body of His glory. Is this not what we desire the most? To be resurrected and remain to the presence of the Lord! To be beside our Beloved Lord as He returns to this earth in His own kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2.12)!

Now, within this one verse, there are four important words that need some explanation. The words are *snatched away, clouds, meet* and *air*.

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### ***Snatched away.***

First, the Greek word which is translated *snatched away* (or, *rapture* as referred to by most people) is *harpazō*, which means “to seize with a sudden grasp and carry away.” The word is found in Matthew 11.12; 13.19; Luke 16.16; John 6.15; 10.12, 28; Acts 8.39; 23.10; 2 Corinthians 12.2, 4; 1 Thessalonians 4.17; Jude 23; and Revelation 12.5.

According to Paul, the asleep (dead) *in* Christ will be raised from among the dead and along with the living *in* Christ will be *snatched away* in clouds to meet the Lord in the air. This is what is called the *rapture*, which is not an incorrect word, but given all the emphasis and implied meaning of it in our day, I prefer to use the expression *snatched away*, which is more literal anyway.

### ***In clouds.***

Second, Paul tells us that the *snatching away* will be in *clouds*. Some translations add the definite article *the*, but this is not in the Greek. It should read *in clouds*. The entire group that are in Christ and standing on the earth alive, at this point in time, will be snatched away together in clouds.

For a long time, I have pictured a day when many clouds appear in the sky and the Lord's people are pulled up into clouds. It is nice for day dreaming, but I doubt that this is the picture that Paul was trying to paint for the brethren.

The epistle to the Hebrews gives us the clue to the meaning of clouds.

Therefore, since we have **so great a cloud of witnesses** surrounding [encompassing] us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.... (HEBREWS 12.1 NASB [CV])

It is amazing how often this verse is presented as if living believers are in the arena of a big stadium, and all the dead saints are in the bleachers of this stadium, looking down and cheering them on. This might help to bolster one's view that all the dead in Christ go to heaven *in* death, but this is not what the writer of the Hebrews epistle meant. The witnesses are all those mentioned in the previous chapter of the epistle from Abel on down to the wanderers in the caves. All gained approval through their faith, but not one of them received what was promised. These saints are dead and awaiting the *better resurrection*; none of them is watching from heaven.

The English Sublinear of the Concordant Greek Text has the phrase *about-lying* for the translated word *encompassing* [surrounding in the NASB]. A cloud is lying about; meaning they are dead in the grave. The origin of the word *cloud* indicates that it refers to a mass of rock, signifying a mass of anything. In this context, a cloud is merely a figure of speech for a mass of witnesses that have gone before us.

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A witness is one who testifies. Their testimony is the testimony of their lives of faith. This is what encompasses us today—the witness of their faith that conquered.

This fits perfectly with the snatching away in clouds. Those who are snatched away are all the conquerors in Christ who hold to the testimony of Jesus. When all are snatched away, they are like a cloud (a mass) of witnesses. Whether actual physical clouds are involved is not the issue. The fact of the matter is that this great mass of people is a witness based on their faith exercised during their lives. The clouds are symbolic of their witness.

We see the same thing with our Lord Jesus as He was taken up and received in a cloud.

And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and **a cloud received Him out of their sight**. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1.9-11 NASB)

No words are insignificant in God’s word; thus, the fact that a cloud received Him indicates something of importance. He is the faithful and true Witness. A cloud signifies this fact.

The Amen, the faithful and **true Witness**, the Beginning of the creation of God.... (Revelation 3.14 NASB)

### ***To meet the Lord.***

*Third*, those snatched away will *meet the Lord*. The word *meet* comes from the Greek word *apantêsis*, which refers to a friendly encounter in which a person goes out to meet another and then escorts the person back from whence he came. It does not imply that one meets a person and then continues on with that person to another place. This word is used in two other places; the first is in reference to the ten virgins going out to meet the Bridegroom and escorting Him to the wedding (Matthew 25.6), and the second place is in reference to brethren going out to meet Paul (Acts 28.15) and escort him to Rome, the seat of power in that day. In like fashion, it is just as likely that when the Lord comes, His body of conquerors will be *snatched away* to meet Him in the air, and then they will escort Him back to the earth to take the great commission to the nations. They will do exactly what Philip the evangelist (Acts 8.38-40) was compelled to do, and that is to preach the gospel of the kingdom to the nations in fulfillment of the kingdom commission that must go forth to the end of the eon (Matthew 28.18-20).

Now, we can connect this thought to the cloud of witnesses in John’s declaration.

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**BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS**, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. (Revelation 1.7 NASB)

What (who) are the clouds? They are the ones who are snatched away to meet the Lord and escort Him back to the earth for every eye to see Him, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day (2 Thessalonians 1.9-10).

### *In the air.*

*Fourth*, the meeting is in the air. Paul never mentions being taken up to the throne or to heaven. Instead, he has believers rising and meeting the Lord in the air, which is related more to the lower atmosphere of our earth. In Scripture, *air* often refers to the area around us, close to the ground (see Acts 22.23; 1 Corinthians 9.26; 1 Corinthians 14.9). There is also a chief of the jurisdiction of the air, the spirit now working in the sons of stubbornness (Ephesians 2.2). <sup>11</sup>

As stated elsewhere, Scripture does not state that Elijah was taken up to heaven; but rather, he was caught up in a whirlwind, which is a weather phenomenon associated with the air. But there is another story in Scripture that uses the same word *harpazō*, and this is found in the account of Philip and the eunuch. Perhaps this one account is a type of the *snatching away* that Paul described to the Thessalonians. After he shared Jesus with the eunuch and baptized him, Philip was *snatched away* (*harpazō*) to another place on earth. Presumably, Philip was caught up in the air by the spirit of the Lord and transported to another city, or he simply transcended time and space.

And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, **the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away** [*harpazō*]; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing. **But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities** until he came to Caesarea. (Acts 8.38-40 NASB)

To emphasize the point again, notice that *snatched away* comes from the same Greek word *harpazō* and that Philip was not removed from the earth; he was merely transported to another place on earth. Could we not assume that he was caught up in the air?

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<sup>11</sup> It must be noted that John refers to the child of the woman, a son, a male, being snatched away to the throne of God (Revelation 12.1-5 CV) and the 144,000 singing a new song before the throne (Revelation 14.1-5). These verses **signify** spiritual truths regarding the conquerors or overcomers of Christ and are best interpreted **spiritual [things] by spiritual [words]** (1 Corinthians 2.12-13 ALT).

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### *When?*

It is safe to state that today there are many views on when this glorious event will occur. Many declare that there are no prophetic events to be fulfilled; Christ could come any day at any time, and when He does come, both the resurrection and the snatching away will occur immediately back-to-back in the twinkling of an eye. However, this cannot be so. Consider this: all the events surrounding Jesus' life and crucifixion coincide precisely with the events prophesied by the Hebrew prophets, as well as the spring feasts celebrated by Israel. Christ was crucified precisely on Passover in 33 AD. The Holy Spirit was given to the ecclesia precisely on Pentecost fifty days after Christ's resurrection. Now, if these spring feasts were fulfilled by Jesus at His first advent, then it stands to reason that the fall feasts—the Feast of Trumpets and the Feast of the Tabernacles, along with the Day of Atonement—must be fulfilled at His second advent.

The Feast of Trumpets corresponds with the resurrection of the dead. The Day of Atonement corresponds with a call for the ecclesia of Christ to repent for remaining in the wilderness and never entering into the promised land, that is, the fullness of the Holy Spirit. The Feast of the Tabernacles corresponds with the transfiguration of the conquerors in Christ when they receive their spiritual, celestial bodies of glory.

Perhaps, we can expect that in some year during September–October, the last trumpet will sound at the Feast of the Trumpets and the dead in Christ will rise. The snatching away will not occur immediately, for the ecclesia must enter into the Day of Atonement ten days later. Five days after this is the Feast of the Tabernacles when the saints receive their glorified bodies. The snatching away must occur with the Feast of the Tabernacles, and Christ must come within this feast, possibly in the middle of it (Leviticus 23; John 7.14).

Regardless of how one views the timing of these events, let us not lose sight of the fact that it is the transfiguration into the likeness of Christ that will allow His body to traverse the universe, to move freely back and forth between the physical realm and the spiritual, celestial realm. It is this very change that will allow His prized possession to be *snatched away* to meet Him in the air; to enter into His realm, which is spiritual and celestial, and to escort Him back to the physical realm of the earth. Also, it is this very change that will allow His body, which is His complement, to work with Him in the coming eons as He sums up or gathers up all in the heavens and on the earth (Ephesians 1.10). After all, Christ is *Head over all, to the ecclesia which is His body, the complement of the One completing the all in all* (Ephesians 1.22-23 cv).

What should bring great delight to our hearts and encourage us to conquer is that a day is coming when we will be resurrected and transfigured to be like our Lord in glory. When we see Him we will be like Him. Can you imagine anything more glorious than when our Beloved looks into our eyes He sees a reflection of Himself? This is the very heart of our expectation and of our Lord's as well. Let us

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hold fast to this hope, and let us wait patiently. Our hope is to be at home with the Lord, and this comes with the transfiguration, for then we shall be like Him and will always be together with the Lord, which leads us to the last point before concluding this chapter.

### ***To be at home with the Lord.***

There is one verse that many use as their proof-positive text that *in* death believers, in fact, receive a new body and go to be with the Lord in heaven, as if immortality does not come through transfiguration, but it comes *in* death, which is an oxymoron. *Oxymoron* is defined as “a figure of speech in which opposite or contradictory ideas or terms are combined.” Truly, combining immortality with death is an oxymoron; yet, this combination is preached from the pulpits of Christendom as if it were a fact with no contradiction. Just in case you missed the point, immortality is about life not death; the two are on opposite ends of the spectrum, as far as the east is from the west.

Listening to preaching coming over the airwaves, I periodically hear preachers declaring to their listeners that Paul taught “to be out of the body is to be at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5.8); therefore, when you die you immediately go to heaven.”

If we allow Scripture to speak, it will become obvious that Paul never taught such a thing. The fact of the matter is that many actually misquote Paul, for he placed and not is between out of the body and at home with the Lord. Interestingly, the ones who misquote Paul are also ones who are quick to declare that Scripture must be interpreted in context, and yet, for this one verse, they totally ignore the context and text of Paul’s words. The error does not stop here either, for they hold to something that is contrary to what Paul taught in all his epistles.

To prove this point, let us look at 2 Corinthians 4.13-5.10 and interject passages from Paul’s other epistles.

Now having the same spirit of faith, in accord with what is written, “I believe, wherefore I speak also,” we also are believing, wherefore we are speaking also, being aware that **He Who rouses the Lord Jesus will be rousing us also**, through Jesus, and will be presenting us together with you. (2 Corinthians 4.13-14 cv)

Notice Paul’s emphasis on being roused or raised from among the dead just as Jesus was roused. This is in line with his encouragement to the Thessalonians, which, according to Paul, occurs when Jesus descends from heaven.

For this we say to you by [the] word of the Lord, that we, the ones living, the ones being left to the Arrival of the Lord, by no means shall precede the ones having fallen asleep [fig., who have died]. Because the Lord Himself with a shout of command, with [the] voice of an archangel and with [the] trumpet of

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God, will descend from heaven, and **the dead in Christ will rise first**, then we, the ones living, the ones being left, will be caught up together with them in [the] clouds to a meeting of the Lord in [the] air, and so we will always be with the Lord! (1 Thessalonians 4.15-17 ALT)

With this glorious event, we will *all* be caught up *together* (snatched away) and God will be presenting us *together*, *for if we are believing that Jesus died and rose, thus also, those who are put to repose [died], will God, through Jesus, lead forth together with Him* (1 Thessalonians 4.14 cv). Read this carefully; it does not state that the ones who died are alive *in* death, as if living in the presence of God. Simply, Paul was assuring the brethren that those who had fallen asleep (dead) in Christ will also be brought forth with Him or through Jesus. The resurrected, along with the alive and remaining ones, will all be led forth through Him. This is the tenor of Paul's encouragement.

Next, Paul introduced the thought that the body is decaying, even as the spiritual man is being renewed each day.

For all is because of you, that the grace, increasing through the majority, should be superabounding in thanksgiving to the glory of God. Wherefore we are not despondent, but even if our **outward man is decaying**, nevertheless that within us is being renewed day by day. (2 Corinthians 4.15-16 cv)

Through affliction, Paul and his associates were suffering in the body, but inwardly they were growing in the Lord with a view to the eons to come.

For the **momentary lightness of our affliction is producing for us a transcendently transcendent eonian burden of glory**, at our not noting what is being observed, but what is not being observed, for what is being observed is temporary, yet what is not being observed is eonian. (2 Corinthians 4.17-18 cv)

The coming eons cannot be seen with the physical eye, for the eons of the eons are yet future. However, we endure momentary afflictions as spiritual proof that the glory of the eons to come is our destiny. As Paul had written previously to the Corinthians: "*What [things] an eye did not see and an ear did not hear and did not enter into the heart of humanity, [fig., no person thought could happen], which [things] God prepared for the ones loving Him*" [Isaiah 64.4] (1 Corinthians 2.9 ALT).

Now, within the context of the eons, Paul introduced the expectation of being clothed or dressed with a habitation which is out of heaven.

For we are aware that, if our terrestrial tabernacle house should be demolished, we have a building of God, a house not made by hands, eonian, in the heavens. For in this also we are groaning, longing to be **dressed in**

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**our habitation which is out of heaven**, if so be that, being dressed also, we shall not be found naked. (2 Corinthians 5.1-2 cv)

This is not the only place that Paul made reference to a heavenly habitation that we will receive when Christ comes from heaven. We wait for our Savior to come; we do not wait to die to go to Him.

For our realm is inherent in the heavens, out of which we are awaiting a Saviour also, the Lord, Jesus Christ, **Who will transfigure the body of our humiliation, to conform it to the body of His glory**, in accord with the operation which enables Him even to subject all to Himself. (Philippians 3.20-21 cv]

Paul was not alone in this expectation; John had the same expectation.

Beloved, we are now children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we will be. But we know that when it [or, He] shall be revealed, **we will be like Him**, because we will see Him just as He is! (1 John 3.2 ALT)

Then, in the context of being dressed with a heavenly habitation, Paul brought into focus the end of mortality.

For we also, who are in the tabernacle, are groaning, being burdened, on which we are not wanting to be stripped, but to be dressed, **that the mortal may be swallowed up by life**. (2 Corinthians 5.3-4 cv)

As a reminder, this verse is joined with Paul's defense of the resurrection previously made in his first epistle to the Corinthians. When mortality is swallowed up by life, we put on immortality.

We shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For **this corruptible must put on incorruption**, and **this mortal must put on immortality**. (1 Corinthians 15.51b-53)]

As another reminder, this leads to the verses most often erroneously quoted as proof that in death believers go to heaven to be with the Lord. For comparison, two translations are presented.

Now He Who produces us for this same longing is God, Who is also giving us the earnest of the spirit. Being, then, courageous always, and aware that, **being at home in the body**, we are **away from home from the Lord** (for by faith are we walking, not by perception), yet we are encouraged, and are delighting rather to be away from home out of the body **and** to be at home with the Lord. (1 Corinthians 5.5-8 cv)

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Now the One having prepared us for this same [thing is] God, the One having given to us the down payment [or, guarantee] of the Spirit. Therefore, being confident at all times and knowing that **being at home in the body we are away from the Lord**—for by faith we walk about [fig., conduct ourselves], not by sight—but we are confident and prefer rather **to be away from the body and to be at home with the Lord!** (2 Corinthians 5.5-8 ALT)

Paul made no mention that being away from the body leads to being at home with the Lord *in* death. In fact, as seen in verse 5.4, Paul has mortality being swallowed up in life, and this comes about only when Christ comes and changes or transfigures His saints in the twinkling of an eye. If we allow Paul's words to stand as written, we must conclude that he was groaning in his body of death as he longed for one day, not *in* death, but a future resurrection day in which he will be raised up to be with the Lord, and then and only then will he, along with all the saints, be at home with the Lord.

Paul did not state that to be away from the body *is* to be at home with the Lord. He placed the conjunction *and* between the two thoughts, which means that he was merely contrasting the two conditions, not making a theological statement about death. Paul then proceeded to contrast the two thoughts of at home and away from home.

Wherefore we are ambitious also, whether **at home** or **away from home**, to be well pleasing to Him. (2 Corinthians 5.9 cv)

In this verse, Paul referred back to the previous verse: *Being, then, courageous always, and aware that, being at home in the body, we are away from home from the Lord* (2 Corinthians 5.6 cv). We could reword verse 9 as: Wherefore we are ambitious also, whether *at home in the body* or *away from home from the Lord*, to be well pleasing to Him. Our pleasing the Lord is to be done in this life in our bodies of humiliation, which is what Paul wrote to the Ephesians: *As children of light be walking (for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth), testing what is well pleasing to the Lord* (Ephesians 5.10 cv).

### ***The judgment seat of God.***

Why are we to be well pleasing to Him in this life? It is because we must all appear before our Lord at His judgment seat or bema. This will occur in the presence of the Lord, whether it is at the first or second resurrection.

For **we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ**, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5.10 NASB)

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For all of us must be manifested in front of **the dais** [bema] **of Christ**, that each should be requited for that which he puts into practice through the body, whether good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5.10 cv)

This verse is often interpreted to mean that every believer will stand before the Lord at the same time. This cannot be the proper view if one holds, as previously presented, that some believers will rise in the second resurrection to appear at the great white throne judgment with unbelievers.

The judgment seat of Christ is also described as the judgment seat of God in Romans 14.10: ***We will all stand before the judgment seat of God.***

We need to be reminded that the verse that follows reads: ***Being aware, then, of the fear of the Lord, we are persuading men.*** Paul saw the judgment seat as a very serious matter, and so should we. *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God* (Hebrews 10.31 KJV). But to balance this thought we also need to be reminded of John's word in reference to God is love: *By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. **There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.** We love, because He first loved us* (1 John 4.17-19 NASB). Let us never forget that love conquers all, even fear. If we love as God loves us, then there will be no fear even at the judgment seat because love never leads to punishment; it leads to glory.

However, no one is exempt from judgment, and as such, the great white throne judgment is the same as the judgment seat of God. The Greek word for *seat* is *bema*, and it refers to a raised platform or a throne. The great white throne surely will rise above all that will appear in the presence of the Judge and Lord of all.

David also saw his judgment coming in the presence of the Lord.

**Let my judgment come forth from Your presence;** let Your eyes look with equity. (Psalm 17.2 NASB)

Consequently, we must please Him through our practices while at home in the body and away from the Lord. The believer's manifestation before the Lord does not come *in* death, for it comes *in* life; resurrection, immortal life that is our hope.

So that the import of what has been presented is not lost, let us recap the significant points of this section of Paul's epistle.

Paul began with the expectation that we *all together* will be roused from the dead, just as Jesus was roused from the dead, and our rousing is in reference to what is eonian, that is, what is of the coming eons. This alone lays the foundation for what follows.

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It is at this time (in the rousing) that we will be dressed with our habitation out of heaven, when the mortal is swallowed up in life (immortal life). As we wait for that glorious day, we groan in our bodies because we are away from the Lord, for we prefer or long to be with Him just as the Thessalonians were encouraged that, when He comes out of heaven and snatches us *all together*, we will always be with the Lord. Until then, we walk by faith, knowing that it will come about one day, and as we do, we desire to be well pleasing to Him, because in that day, we will be manifested before His bema to be requited for what we have done while in the body, both good and bad. Simply, it is our fondest expectation to be away from our home in our body of death and to be at home with the Lord in our new glorified, spiritual body just like our Lord's body, and this comes about when our Lord steps out of heaven at the conclusion of our present eon.

In conclusion, the ultimate goal for mankind is to pass out of death into immortality or a life beyond death. The only way to reach this goal is through Christ who is *the Way, the Resurrection and the Life*. Life only comes through God's Son who was resurrected from among the dead. When Christ comes a second time and is revealed, His sanctified and happy people, whether asleep or alive, will put off mortality and put on immortality, to become like Him and to enjoy the blessing of the oncoming eons, all in accord with the purpose of the eons.

**Thus, this mortal must put on immortality!**

[The following chart presents the glorious and absolute success of the Son of God in eventually bringing all mankind out of death and into immortality. It is not presented as an exact timeline.]

### *From Adam to Calvary*

Immortality	No one of Adam's race
Death	All Mankind

### *After Calvary to the present*

Immortality	Christ <i>alone</i> has immortality!
Death	All Mankind

### *In the Presence of the Lord*

Immortality	Christ <i>plus</i> the Firstfruits, then the Just
Death	Remainder of Mankind

### *At the Consummation of the Eons*

Immortality	Christ <i>plus</i> All Mankind
Death	Abolished! None of Mankind