

Error Concerning the Resurrection

"Hymenaeus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some." 2Timothy 2.17-18.

The doctrine of the resurrection seems to have been attacked or distorted from earliest times. Keeping within the bounds of the New Testament we find that the "Saducees" believed that there was no resurrection, Matt. 22.23; that the Athenian philosophers when they heard of the resurrection of the dead mocked, Acts 17.32; and the questions that are dealt with in 1 Corinthians 15, reveal how much speculation there was in the church itself regarding this important subject. The verse at the head of this study reveals the names of two men that the Apostle Paul identifies as having erred regarding the doctrine of "the resurrection of the dead", and their error is summed up in the fact they believed the resurrection was past.

Paul's condemnation of their error in 2 Timothy 2 follows immediately after his words of exhortation to all believers on the importance of *"rightly dividing the word of truth"*, 2 Timothy 2.15, and no doubt the erroneous teaching of Hymenaeus and Philetus was uppermost in the Apostles mind with regard to those who had most certainly failed to do just that. Paul's condemnation of their words and teaching is scathing, he says they had been entangled with *"profane and vain babblings"*, v.16 and that their words were like a gangrene, which could eat into and actually *"overthrow the faith of some"*, v.18. We must always be on guard when such false teaching comes to light, remembering that it is possible that those who listen can be deceived and themselves become totally confused.

So what exactly was this evil doctrine which the Apostle warns against? What is meant by their statement, *"the resurrection is past already"*? It does not say these men denied either the resurrection of Christ or the resurrection of the believer, but only that they taught, *"the resurrection is past already"*. Now if such a statement were made of our Lord Jesus then we could heartily agree with that blessed fact for scripture plainly states, *"Now is Christ risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that slept"* 1 Corinthians 15.20. The evil doctrine therefore, described by the Apostle as a "gangrene" can only refer to the believer. The erroneous teaching was that the resurrection of the believer was past already. Now if such a statement were confined to the spiritual concept of the glorious relationship every member of the church which is His body has entered into by faith, truth would have been stated, for when Christ was raised from the dead, the members of His body were potentially raised too, *"And hath raised us up and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus"* Ephesians 2.6. The error was that they were teaching not that the believer had been raised spiritually and potentially in Christ Jesus but that it had in fact taken place literally and for the believer resurrection was now past. The Apostle had certainly expressed his desire *"to depart and to be with Christ"* Philippians 1.23, and of his intense desire to *"attain unto the out resurrection of the dead"*, Philippians 3.11, but this had been taken up in the wrong sense by some, who were teaching falsely that at death the believer had passed immediately into the presence of the Lord and that for them the resurrection was past already and that there was therefore no need to await the literal resurrection of the dead as others do. It is this the Apostle Paul outrightly condemns. To be honest Philippians 3.20-21 should have been sufficient to correct this false teaching, Paul states, *"Our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus; Who shall change this body of our humiliation that it may be fashioned like unto the body of His glory"*. A simple reading of these verses shows that Paul expected no change to overcome him until the Saviour would be revealed from heaven, and then the body of humiliation would be changed like unto His own glorious body, and such teaching is in keeping with everything else the Apostle wrote. There is no possible room here for a resurrection that has already taken place. This "body" cannot be spiritualized away, and while Philippians 3.21 stands written, any doctrine that approximates to "sudden death, sudden glory" for any child of God is completely precluded. Our life is hid with Christ in God and not until Christ who is our life is manifested, can that life become active in His redeemed people.

The fact that the Apostle in his last epistle so uncompromisingly condemns such a doctrine should cause any who have entertained such an idea to reconsider, or as the chapter says *"repent unto the acknowledging of the truth"*. The false teachers did not teach that the resurrection of Christ Himself was past already, as we have already stated that would have been true, but they were proclaiming the false doctrine that the resurrection of the believing member of the body of Christ had taken place already, and by so teaching were robbing the true believer of the glorious hope Paul presents to them in all his epistles, namely, the resurrection of/from the dead.

Paul was facing martyrdom when he wrote 2 Timothy and if there were some new doctrine to be revealed surely now would have been the time. If he was looking forward to passing from his prison into the presence of His Lord he most surely would have given some personal word regarding this. We search this epistle in vain to find even the slightest suggestion of such a thing but instead we encounter these words, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing"* 2 Timothy 4.7-8. He points us in quite another direction, for he looks forward to *"that day"* in common with all those who love His appearing when the crown of righteousness will be awarded.

Truth is progressively revealed throughout scripture but *"progressive revelation"* is a completely different thing to *"replacement revelation"*. What I mean is this, when a premise is made it will be added to line upon line, precept upon precept but the premise itself will never be false. David writes *"For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?"* Psalm 6.5, Isaiah says *"the grave cannot praise thee, death can not celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth."* Solomon tells us, *"The dead know not anything"* Ecc. 9.5, much can be added to this from scripture, and has, but the premise itself remains unchanged. Solomon also wrote, *"man returneth to the dust and the spirit unto God who gave it"* Ecc. 12.7, and though much more has been revealed throughout scripture Solomon's words are as true as the day they were first written. When in Job we read, *"Man lies down and rises not until the heavens be no more, they shall not wake nor be raised out of their sleep"* Job 14.12, much more can be revealed but the main thrust of Job's words remain unchanged. When our Lord tells us the *"all that are in the grave shall hear My voice and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, they that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgement"* John 5.28,29, Paul may be given the wisdom to elaborate more fully on the subject but the words of the Saviour are undoubtedly true and they cannot be changed. Continually Paul in his epistles refers to the *"resurrection of the dead"* and there can be no mistake made as to what he means, he speaks of it in the epistles written before the Acts and those written after, there was no doubt in his mind that the only way the dead believer could ever be in the presence of His Lord was through resurrection and so sure was about that glorious fact that he tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 that *"if the dead rise not.....then they also which sleep in Christ are perished"*. Nothing that we teach should alter in any way the basic teaching of such scriptural statements as those shown above. To teach that there are already *"saints in heaven"* and that for them resurrection is now past is to undermine and negate the inspired words of God's servants, but worse still it is to doubt and make of non effect the immortal words of the Son of God Himself.