

Resurrection of Man

Written by Eric Shuster

Founder and Executive Director of the Foundation for Christian Studies



Before, during, and after the time of Christ, there were vigorous debates between the Pharisees and Sadducees regarding the resurrection. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of man and the Sadducees did not. The resurrection is a difficult theological concept to grasp for most Christians in that it calls on us to believe in a process of life to death to life again for a single organism, a process that is outside of our human intellect.

While most sects of Christianity teach about the resurrection of Christ, most do not spend enough time discussing human resurrection. This is the case despite the fact that the scriptures are replete with references to our own personal resurrection before the final judgment.

Physical Death is Not the End

Throughout the ages, death has brought about feelings of finality and despair. In the minds of many, death is the end leaving no hope for the future. The faithful know that Jesus Christ has “broken the bands of death” (Mosiah 16:7), and by doing so “death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54). This victory over death comes through the Atonement and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

There scriptures provide detailed accounts of Christ’s resurrection, while providing a clear understanding of the future resurrection of all people who have lived and died in mortality upon the earth. Jesus exclaimed, “Because I live, ye shall live also” (John 14:19), referring to our own resurrection.

The Reuniting of Bodies and Spirits

In death, our bodies and spirits are separated; in the resurrection our bodies and spirits are reunited in a perfected state. The prophet Alma recorded these words from Amulek: “The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame, even as we now are at this time; ... Now, this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous; and even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but every thing shall be restored to its perfect frame...” (Alma 11:42–44).

To fully comprehend the resurrection one must understand the concept of spirits and souls. The apostle Bruce R. McConkie offers a detailed description of the relationship between spirits and souls: “Spirit beings are souls; the two terms are synonymous... After the spirit leaves the body and goes into the spirit world to await the day of the resurrection, it is still designated as a soul. A mortal soul consists of a body and spirit united in a temporary or mortal union. An immortal soul is a resurrected personage, one who has been raised from mortality into immortality, one for whom body and spirit have become inseparably connected” (Mormon Doctrine, Bruce R. McConkie; 1979 Bookcraft, Salt Lake City, 748).

We Continue Progression after our Resurrection

The resurrection not only restores life, but ushers in a new phase in our eternal progression. Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles wrote, “In our eternal journey, the resurrection is the mighty milepost that signifies the end of mortality and the beginning of immortality” (Dallin H. Oaks, “Resurrection,” Ensign, May 2000, 14). Without the resurrection we could not achieve immortality, nor could we experience a “fullness of joy” (D&C 93:33–34). Paul understanding the hopelessness that would result from the absence of the resurrection wrote, “If there be no resurrection of the dead, then ... is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain” (1 Cor. 15:13–14).

Our knowledge of the resurrection gives hope and understanding that death is not the end, but rather a gateway to the eternities. Our testimony of the

resurrection helps us put into perspective our trials in mortality, while providing us motivation to live our lives in accordance with the commandments of God.

There Are Two Distinctly Separate Resurrections

Bruce R. McConkie points out that there are two distinctly different resurrections that are approximately 1,000 years apart: “Two great resurrections await the inhabitants of the earth: one is the first resurrection, the resurrection of life, the resurrection of the just; the other is the second resurrection, the resurrection of damnation, the resurrection of the unjust” (Mormon Doctrine, Bruce R. McConkie; 1979 Bookcraft, Salt Lake City, 640). McConkie goes on to explain that the first resurrection will happen at the second coming and have a morning (for those who will meet Christ at his second coming – Celestial bodies) and an afternoon (for those who come forth right after the second coming – Terrestrial bodies). See 1 Cor. 15:40 for Biblical references to Celestial and Terrestrial bodies. Following the thousand year millennial reign of Christ, the second resurrection will take place. Those coming forth first in the second resurrection will have Celestial bodies, and those coming forth last in the second resurrection will be cast into outer darkness, both with and without bodies including those who gave up their first estate (Satan and his followers who will not have a body and therefore technically not resurrected) and the sons of perdition (those whose sins are unforgivable).

The concept of two resurrections is new to many Christians, but can be quickly understood after studying the Book of Revelation 20, John 5, and Acts 24.

Preparing ourselves for our own Resurrection

It behooves us to prepare ourselves for the resurrection by living a righteous life on earth, including taking care of the body we have now. The resurrection will not cleanse us from sin or magically change our souls from one state to another. In his letter to the Corinthians Paul was quite clear that those who are void of righteousness in mortality will not be raised in righteousness in the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:35-44). To this end Alma counsels men that “this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God” (Alma 34:32).

Christian doctrine provides that families can be together forever through the sealing powers of the priesthood in the holy temple. Applying this doctrine to the resurrection means that we have the opportunity to be resurrected with family members and to live together in the eternities. Not only is such doctrine a motivation to live a righteous life while on earth, but it gives hope in times where temporal death separates loved ones. Additionally, Christian doctrine provides for the resurrection of perfect and glorious bodies. For this reason one might consider Paul’s admonition that our body is a temple and to take good care of our bodies while in mortality.

Conclusion

The resurrection of Jesus Christ has made it possible for us to be resurrected into the eternities. The spiritual state into which we are resurrected, depends on the life we live here on earth.

About the Foundation for Christian Studies

The Foundation for Christian Studies (FCS) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the study, teaching, and practice of Christianity in a way that inspires all people, regardless of theological differences, to come together in support of essential Christian values and compassionate service to God’s children across the globe. The FCS accomplishes this by providing rich scriptural course study and spiritual commentary, interactive web forums for thoughtful discussion, an online store offering inspirational Christian media, and a charitable giving program that emphasizes individual and community self-reliance.

About The Sword Series™

The Sword Series™ is an ongoing collection of Christian theological essays that are freely distributed by the FCS for the education and enjoyment of all. For more information on the Sword Series™ visit the FCS website at www.studychristianity.org.

For online versions of all four standard works of scripture (Old Testament, New Testament, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants) see: <http://scriptures.lds.org/>

Note: The views expressed in this paper are those of the Foundation for Christian Studies (FCS) and its theological advisors based upon their collective study and understanding of the scriptures under the influence of the Holy Ghost. All formatted content in this paper is the property of the FCS and may be distributed freely. Any modification of the content of this paper without the express written consent of the FCS is prohibited. Copyright 2008