

The Basic Doctrines of Christianity

Resurrection of the Dead

The resurrection of the dead.

If Christians go to heaven after they die, why does Paul and other apostles talk about a resurrection of Christians who have died?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 [NIV] *“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep [die], or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope [as yet, not knowing Jesus as their Saviour]. We [Christians] believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that **God will bring with Jesus** [at His second coming] **those who have fallen asleep** [died] **in Him** [Jesus Christ]. According to the Lord’s own word [either this was something that Jesus had revealed directly to Paul, or it was a teaching that had been passed on orally by the apostles and other Christians], we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep [died]. For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and **the dead in Christ will rise first** [in a resurrection of the dead]. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be **caught up together with them in the clouds** [not in God’s Heaven but a few hundred feet up] to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever. Therefore [because of what we have just been told] encourage each other with these words.”*

Note the dead in Christ remain dead in the grave until the time of their resurrection at Christ’s second coming.

This does **not** conflict with other scriptures about the status of those who die.

Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 [NIV] *“For the living know that they will die, but **the dead know nothing**; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.”*

The dead have **no** part in what happens after they die.

Psalms 146:3-4 [NIV] *“Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. **When their spirit departs, they return to the ground**; on that very day their plans come to nothing.”*

The spirit that gives us intellect in life departs from us at our death, and we return to the dust out of which we were created.

Psalms 6:5 [NIV] *“No-one remembers you [God] when he is dead. **Who praises you from the grave?**”*

Once we die, Christian or non-Christian, we can have **no** relationship with our Creator, **not** even praise Him until our resurrection.

Psalms 104:29 [NIV] *“When you [God] hide your face, they are terrified, when you take away their breath they die and return to the dust.”*

At death the relationship we have with God as a physical being ends.

The moment of death can be frightening unless God blesses us with a peaceful end to our physical life.

Ecclesiastes 3:19-22 [NIV] *“Man’s fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; **all come from dust, and to dust all return.** Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?” So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?”*

Solomon was saying this from the viewpoint of most humans who do **not** as yet have a hope of life beyond the grave as Christians do.

Job 14:14-15 [NIV] *“If a man dies, will he live again? All the days of my hard service **I will wait for my renewal** [Hebrew “chālîyphāh” – alteration or change] to come. **You** [God] **will call** [Job out of his grave] **and I will answer you;** you will long for the creature your hands have made.”*

Job’s hope lay in a resurrection when the new Job that God had moulded during His physical lifetime will once again be in God’s presence.

Psalms 116:15 [NIV] *“Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.”*

Precious to God because after death we can **no** longer sin or fall away from our Christian life.

The resurrection is mentioned in two different ways.

1 The resurrection **of** the dead.

Acts 17:32 [NIV] *“When they heard about the resurrection **of** the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.”*

A general resurrection.

Acts 23:6 [NIV] *“Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, “My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection **of** the dead.”*

Again a general resurrection.

Acts 24:15 [NIV] *“and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection **of** both the righteous and the wicked.”*

A general resurrection that includes both righteous and wicked.

1 Corinthians 15:21 [NIV] *“For since death came through a man, the resurrection **of** the dead comes also through a man.”*

Sin entered into human life through the rebellion of Adam. Adam died as all humans have ever since.

The resurrection of all humans only exists because One Man, Jesus Christ, overcame death through His resurrection.

2 The resurrection **from** the dead.

Luke 20:34-35 [NIV] *“Jesus replied, “The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection **from** the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage,”*

Physical human beings marry and have physical offspring and eventually die, but after being resurrected from death physical marriage will end.

Acts 10:39-41 [NIV] *“We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but **God raised him from the dead** on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen, by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.”*

Jesus was raised from the dead.

Romans 1:1-4 [NIV] *“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God, the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was **declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.**”*

The Holy Spirit resurrected Jesus Christ the Son of Man from the dead.

Romans 6:9-10 [NIV] *“For we know that **since Christ was raised from the dead**, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.”*

Why is this difference crucial as well as very interesting?

The resurrection **from**, or out of, the dead means that there are still others who remain dead and will stay dead for a while longer.

Hebrews 6:2 [NIV] *“... the resurrection of the dead ...”*

This scripture does **not** mention resurrection **from** the dead.

1 Corinthians 15:20 [NIV] *“But Christ has indeed been raised **from** the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”*

Jesus Christ was raised **from** the dead as the firstfruit of all who have died.

Colossians 1:18 [NIV] *“And He [Jesus Christ] is the head of the body, the church, He is the beginning and the firstborn **from among the dead**, so that in every thing He [Jesus] might have the supremacy.”*

Indicating that the others who were dead remained dead.

Acts 2:29, 35 [NIV] *“Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch **David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day.**” ... “until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”*

King David is still in his grave and has **not** ascended to heaven, nor has anyone else except Jesus Christ the Son of God, Son of Man and the firstfruit of all who have died.

If other people had been resurrected and were in heaven Jesus Christ would **not** have been the firstfruit of the dead.

This resurrection **from** the dead of Jesus Christ is the proof that everyone will some day be raised from death even as Jesus has already been raised from the dead.

The general resurrections

John 5:25-29 [NIV] *“I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when **the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God** and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”*

The word translated “condemned” is “*krisis*” – a decision for or against – a tribunal – or judgement [more about this in the next study].

Acts 24:15 [NIV] *“and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.”*

Both righteous and wicked will be resurrected back to life.

Daniel 12:2 [NIV] *“**Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.**”*

Same teaching of a general resurrection in the Old Testament.

There will be a resurrection of the dead for every human being who has ever existed.

More than one time of resurrection.

Revelation 20:6 [NIV] *“**Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.**”*

The term “*first resurrection*” implies there is more than one.

The passage of scripture in **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** which we have already studied corresponds to this first resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:50-57 [NIV] *“I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. **For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.** For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Still referring to the first resurrection at the return of Jesus Christ.

The reference to a trumpet sounding points towards this yet future time, which is expanded on in the revelation of Jesus Christ to the apostle John in an audio-visual vision given to John about AD95 on the island of Patmos.

Paul, to encourage and stimulate the church, refers to this first resurrection of loyal Christians and the dramatic body change they will experience.

A time when they all will share in the victory over death that Jesus Christ, through His resurrection, has made for all humanity.

Now let us move to what must be a second resurrection because it is so different to what we have just studied.

Revelation 20:11-13 [NIV] *“Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. **And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.**”*

In this resurrection there is **no** mention of these people being Christians.

The fact they are standing before the throne of Jesus Christ proves a resurrection of the dead.

This resurrection is linked with an opening up of the “books” – Greek “*biblos*” – scrolls or sheets of writing, that is the Christian Bible.

The inference is that this is the first time these people have heard of, read or understood what is written, for they had never had the Holy Spirit to reveal it to them.

1 Corinthians 2:11 [NIV] *“For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way **no-one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.**”*

The thoughts that a human being has are dependent on the spirit that is in a human being but **not** in animals.

Job 32:8 [NIV] *“But it is the **spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding.**”*

But this spirit does **not** reveal the things about God, unless it is joined to the Holy Spirit of God.

It is in this resurrection that all non-Christians will be judged, according to how they respond to the opening up to them of the Christian Bible.

When we put these two resurrections together every human being who has ever lived is included.

Also every human being will have the chance to come to know Jesus Christ and to choose whether or not to repent and accept Jesus as their Saviour.

Note another book was opened, the book of life.