

The Book of Hebrews

Part XIV: Resurrection, Judgment, and Grace (Heb. 6:3-8)

I. The Global Resurrection of Humanity

The book of Hebrews has given us the charge to advance into a mature and fruitful life built on a threefold foundation...

1 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of instruction about washings (baptisms) and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do, if God permits.
(Hebrews 6:1-3)

As we rest in Christ and embrace the baptism of water and Spirit (being immersed into his death and resurrection life), there is another key truth that is part of this foundation: *The resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.*

The reality that there is a future resurrection of the dead and a judgment with it is pivotal. This is something that cannot be put to the side. The entire foundation falls apart without it.

The Scriptures teach that a day is coming when all humanity will be raised from the dead. From there, each person will give an account for their lives, and there will be different outcomes for different people.

Much of this subject is shrouded in mystery and, as a result, there's a lot of debate over it. Therefore, we want to approach this with humility, but we also want to be clear about some things that are indisputable in the Scriptures...

28 Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, 29 and will come forth; those who did the good [deeds] to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil [deeds] to a resurrection of judgment.
(John 5:28-29)

Jesus is speaking here about something very similar to what was said by the prophet Daniel and echoed in many other places in Scripture:

2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.
(Daniel 12:2 NIV)

Jesus speaks clearly of a future resurrection for those who are literally dead. A few verses before this in John 5:25 Jesus says, “*an hour is coming, **and now is**, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God.*” This seems to address those who are spiritually dead coming alive at the hearing of the Gospel. In verse 28, however, he only says “*an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice.*”

Jesus releases resurrection life within people now which has tangible power and influence in our bodies and souls. This is the message that we are made one with him and have been raised already in his resurrection (Ephesians 2 & Colossians 3). However, there is also a day coming when he will physically raise every human being from the dead, no matter what they’ve done.

Every deceased person—whether they died at 100 years old or didn’t even make it out the womb (rough estimates put the number of premature deaths throughout history in the hundreds of millions, if not billions of people affected by this part of death’s curse)—will be resurrected in a way that we do not fully understand yet. This is where details need to be held with humility.

What we do know clearly is that people will have new bodies like the One Jesus himself had after his resurrection. People thought Jesus was a spirit disconnected from a body and he went out of his way to show them he had a real body (particularly through eating food...see Luke 24:36-43).

His body was like ours but with some differences. It was not subject to decay. But it was just as physical, and it had at least some kind of digestive system and a nervous system.

Something to Ponder (For the Skeptic)...

- Imagine talking with a human being from the period of Christ 2000 years ago (a person just like you, the same blood running through their veins, the same complexity and emotions), and telling them about the wonders of modern technology. Imagine how crazy they would think you are at some of the things you could share with them...
- Imagine telling them about a fleet of flying machines circling the earth and helping direct the traffic of other machines on the ground with wheels (powered by a substance in the earth called petroleum). Or imagine telling them we can resurrect extinct animals through genetic engineering, and we can use the same technology to make sure a pregnant woman has a baby with blue eyes.
- The point is that the crazy and impossible is only crazy and impossible to someone who doesn’t understand it. A worldwide resurrection of extinct human beings is nothing for the Creator of space-time itself. *And embracing a trust in this foundational truth is something we cannot grow without.*

Every conceived human being has a spirit that lives on beyond their physical body subject to the curse of decay and death. Whatever age their body died, their spirit lives on and it will be reunited with a physical body in this coming day of the resurrection of the dead.

We can think of this like if someone were to destroy all the computers in the world, and yet kept the invisible data stored in devices under the ground. If all computers are gone, nobody can see

the data. But then if someone else came along and built billions of new computers (something that is happening all the time), they could then upload that immaterial data instantly at the speed of light to those new computers, and suddenly we would see all of it again.

In a way, this is what will happen. God will build new “hardware” for the immaterial, invisible “software” of the spirit that is stored right now in an unseen place “underground.”

Now, where are people’s spirits actually? This is also a mystery in Scripture, but it is clear that people go to different places while they wait for this resurrection. Some wander in what the Hebrew Scriptures call *Sheol* (“Hades” in the Greek), a realm of death and darkness. Others, it seems, immediately go to the presence of Jesus in a glorious realm called the third heavens (see 2 Corinthians 5:8 & 12:2).

What we know for sure is that everyone—no matter where they are and no matter what they did or didn’t do—will return to a body at the command of Christ. This is because Jesus died for all humanity to be given new life. Jesus in his resurrected state is called the “first fruits” of those who have died.

20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. 21 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. (1 Corinthians 15:20-21)

Just as death spread to all people through Adam, resurrection life will spread to all people through Christ, who is greater than Adam. Jesus’s resurrection was the down payment of death’s defeat. As tragic and final as death feels, it is only a temporary experience. It’s a shadow that will fade away (see Psalm 23).

This is wonderful news that is part of our essential foundation in the faith. The hope of a future resurrection speaks to the redemption of all trauma and tragedy and sorrow in this current age.

There are many in the church who are fighting for people to understand that eternal life begins now. We are called to experience resurrection life today (Romans 6 & 8). We are also called to enjoy the present moment and not overly focus on the future.

These things are true and have been inspired by the Spirit to awaken us to the Kingdom that is within us now (Luke 17:21). However, there are many who throw out the baby with the bathwater by denying or severely minimizing the central truth and hope of a future resurrection.

Sadly then, some fall into the category of those Paul warned his young disciple Timothy about:

18 Men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some. (2 Timothy 2:18)

Paul taught and believing in a resurrection power inside of us now, but he was also passionate about a future resurrection of the dead that gives hope to the world. Elsewhere, he talked about how hope involves things we do not fully see or experience yet (see Romans 8:24-25). Some throw out the hope of the Gospel where we discover this beautiful truth that loved ones will be physically re-united one; where there will no more war, disease, or death in any form.

Yes, there is a down payment of victory over these things that the church can tap into now. The next part of Hebrews 6 actually talks about this when it mentions those who ***“have tasted the powers of the age to come.”***

The “age to come” is where the full resurrection has taken place, and justice and peace tangibly reign in society and throughout the universe. This statement that says we can “taste the powers of the age to come,” which means we can tap into that age now and call it into the present.

Nonetheless, it is still *an age to come*. In other words, it’s not fully here yet.

This is important because there are countless people who feel the weight of loss and struggle and face horrible tragedy and persecution. This hope is something that triumphs over everything we go through, and it’s the promise of a full redemption of the sorrow in this world.

There is day where all of us will have physical bodies that have eternal cellular regeneration, enjoying food and family and friendship and adventure and wonder; we will cultivate Eden on earth (and possibly extend it to other places in the cosmos); and we will be free from any impact of deception. **Knowing and celebrating this is part of our foundation for life.**

II. Grace and Judgment As One

With this hope of the future resurrection, we also have the reality of an *“eternal judgment”* that comes with it. This is another significant part of the foundation, and if this part is neglected the rest of it falls apart.

But the same goes with the revelation of Christ’s finished work. If we minimize or get rid of Christ’s work, the message of eternal judgment also falls apart. So, it’s very important we understand that grace and judgment are one.

Throughout history, there have been legalistic filters put over God’s Word that have inhibited our ability to “hear” the message of judgment correctly.

The word judgment in Hebrews 6 and other places in the New Testament is *krima*. It means simply a “decision.” It comes from a root word related to separating things.

Judgment is a good thing. God is going to separate wickedness from humanity and this judgment has already been enacted at the cross.

True judgment from a righteous, wise, and loving Creator is about correction and healing. God is not like our Greco-Roman justice systems (which both Protestants and Catholics filter much of their views through). God is a Judge who is at the very same time Father and Redeemer. He is Love itself and love keeps no record of wrongs and exists in eternal patience and mercy. God is also just—but true justice is about restoration and healing.

**13 Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.
(Psalm 96:13 NIV)**

This is where we meld the “concrete” of the foundation of grace and judgment with everything we’ve learned in Hebrews so far. We’ve learned Jesus is the High Priest of humanity. He is our Representative. Thus, Jesus stands in our place, and we are now judged through him.

He judges the people in his faithfulness... We are saved by Jesus’s faithfulness, not our own!

Jesus has absorbed the sins of the world and given us his righteousness. Sin is completely atoned for. This is why every human will be released from death, which is the curse of sin.

**7 "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. 8 "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; 11 and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.
(John 16:7-11)**

Jesus says here that the Holy Spirit will come and convict the world of his finished work where he defeated the enemy and ascended to the Father on our behalf. Jesus already brought judgment at the cross (see John 12:31-32).

When it comes to “sin,” the issue now is now about unbelief according to this passage.

In other words, we can reject grace. We can condemn ourselves by choosing a path that leads to the destruction, even though we are still loved and embraced by the Father.

Jesus gets at this mystery in John 5 in the same conversation about the resurrection we heard earlier. He is speaking there to people who were rejecting his grace—the Jewish leadership of Israel. He goes on to say this:

**45 “Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope.”
(John 5:45)**

This speaks to the fact that if people put their trust in the Law (or other systems of “salvation”), they will reap a destruction from that self-inspired path.

This ties in powerfully with the next part of Hebrews...

4 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. 7 For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; 8 but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. (Hebrews 6:4-8)

Reminder: The author is writing to people who were being persecuted for embracing this strange sect of Judaism called “The Way” which involved following a dead so-called Messiah named Yeshua. They were under pressure to turn back to Temple Judaism with animal sacrifice. There is a direct warning in the letter that points to the consequences if they stay on that path.

In their case, the consequences partly involved the destruction of Jerusalem and the mass execution and enslavement of Jewish people, which happened a few years after this letter was written. This ties in with the reference about land that is close to being cursed and burned.

The Jewish people did not believe or trust in Jesus (this was the John 16 “sin” issue), and they chose the way of the law. In the law, particularly in Deuteronomy 28, it talks about a curse on the land and people if they did not follow the Law completely.

Therefore, we find this reality in the New Testament that God is not the one punishing people, but rather they are reaping what they are sowing by choosing a fruitless path that leads to destruction. God is trying to rescue them, and us, from this path.

So, the writer was warning them that there are consequences to rejecting grace. Sin has been atoned for and death has been universally defeated, but there is still this pathway into destruction if you choose to not receive—take hold of—Christ’s gift of grace.

When it comes to consequences beyond the final resurrection, there is truly a lot of mystery here. It’s important we embrace a posture of both humility and hope.

God is good and there is a wonderful plan beyond our imagination that will unfold even beyond the resurrection of the dead. There is also a severe warning about choosing our own way.

III. Impossible to Renew the Fallen?

In the case of those who have been enlightened...and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

This speaks to those who blatantly reject Jesus and willfully turn to other paths to live their life and/or secure their salvation (such as the original readers who were tempted to go back to sacrificing animals and thus considering Jesus's sacrifice meaningless, which puts him to open shame).

This is **not** about people struggling with their faith and wrestling with sin and guilt. This is someone willfully rejecting Jesus Christ from the heart to the point that they don't care about the consequences.

It is important to note that while it says, *"It is impossible to renew them again to repentance,"* Jesus said the following about another kind of people who was far from repentance.

24 And Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! 25 For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

(Luke 18:24-25)

In this passage, Jesus is essentially saying it's impossible for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God. A camel will never go through the eye of a needle! Therefore, the insinuation—if Jesus left them only with this statement—is that a rich person will not enter the Kingdom.

Jesus's words can be very difficult at times. He makes incredibly hard statements, but this is meant to stir us up to seek him and talk to him. This is the case with the words of Scripture as well. Even in difficult passages, there's an invitation to draw near and get to know the heartbeat behind the literal words of the text.

In other words, his words that confuse and perplex at times are meant to inspire relationship.

In the case of this difficult statement about a rich man entering heaven, the disciples draw near and question him. They dialogue with the Lord and receive a beautiful revelation...

26 They who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" 27 But He said, "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God."

(Luke 18:26-27)

This is a powerful example of how dialoguing with Jesus can help us to know the Spirit behind the "letter" of the words. This also brings us back to the power of reading Scripture through the lens of Christ's grace.

Jesus gives us hope here about a different kind of person, but yet we can apply it to Hebrews 6. While it's impossible for someone to turn back to God after they have walked with Jesus, embraced his Spirit, and then willfully rejected him—nothing is impossible with God. There are many testimonies of people who did turn back.

Toward the end of his life, Peter (one of the disciples who was there when this question of “who can be saved” was asked—and perhaps was the one who asked the question) went on to write that *God's will* is for all people to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). We are called to trust and pray in agreement for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven—that all will come to repentance.

While “*the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment*” leaves us with a lot of questions, we can be assured of a few things... Jesus has completely forgiven us, and he has died humanity's death for us. We are to rest in this—and embrace the life of His Spirit now. We can taste the powers of the age to come and bring it into the present.

And through it all, even when we experience death and tragedy and unanswered prayer, we can still stand secure on the foundation of hope that every single person who has ever suffered and died will be raised to life and come face-to-face with the grace and glory of our Father.

Follow-up Encounter:

As you prepare for communion, take some time to reflect on the key things that touched your heart during this teaching. Ask for fresh grace to “taste the powers of the age to come.” Ask the Lord for a revelation of what this truth means for your life today.

As you take communion, thank Jesus that you are already raised with him and you have access to heavenly riches! Praise him for the “powers of the age to come” already resting within you!

Share with others what came to your heart during this time.