

WHAT DID THE PEOPLE OF CORINTH WHO DENIED THE DEAD RISE THINK OF THE STORY THAT JESUS ROSE?

Paul found that there were converts in Corinth who were falling away and they were saying the dead do not rise. They included Jesus in this for they scoffed at how a dead body can be redeemed and said nobody is able to say what kind of body these dead would have.

Paul retorts that if the dead do not rise neither does Jesus and we are still in our sins. It may be that instead of saying Jesus did not rise they just kept saying nobody rises. So their opposition to the resurrection story was implicit if that is so.

The idea is that Jesus died for sins and rose to be our life, to be part of us and to be with us to look after our souls. Though Jesus rose before the human race in general, in theology the idea is that we all rise together. The resurrection of Jesus then is not just about Jesus. Paul asks them how Jesus could rise if the dead don't rise as they say. That is what he is getting at.

Some think that what they believed was that the Jesus resurrection was not real in the earthly sense of a man dying and rising again bodily. They could have thought of it as a symbol from Heaven for mystics believed that God was so different from what we are used to he has to use symbolic pictures and parables that may take years for us to crack for divine truth is hard if not nearly impossible for mortals to grasp. They thought the death and resurrection of Christ were mystical events. They would say that the apostles think now they had experiences with a resurrected man but this is a primitive attitude and a shadow of the truth that God was trying to get across to them. Many of them would have believed that the apostles did not grasp the secret knowledge in their visions. If the resurrection of Christ was an attempt to give spiritual insight through symbolism and pictures then so was the death of Jesus. The New Testament mentions heretics who believed the resurrection of all the dead had already happened meaning the resurrection just a metaphor for receiving some mystical enlightenment.

They were like the Christians in other places who according to the New Testament were saying that the resurrection had already taken place. They were saying that the resurrection in which the dead come back to life was only a metaphor for some mystical experience that changes your life that makes a whole new person in such a sense that your life starts with that experience.

Let us take that model for the rest of our study.

An argument like that could not be answered by Paul at all except to argue that terrible things would happen if Jesus has not really risen in the way Paul meant and Jesus said he would rise. The objection to this argument is that their objection to the resurrection would have no value for they are interpreting the apostles' experience while it is up to the apostles to interpret their own experience. They were the ones that had the experience after all.

But the heretics would have believed that they themselves got the light from God to crack the code and understand so this objection collapses. The evidence from Paul's reaction to the heretics is that they did not take the death and resurrection of Jesus literally as an event like the birth of Augustus Caesar but as a spiritual or mystical event.

If the heretics were misinterpreting the resurrection of Jesus as a mystical event or as based on visions that were not literally true but some kind of parable or message from something outside of human comprehension what then? That would give them a loophole for saying there is no physical resurrection. Paul would have clearly corrected this if he could. He would have stated that he and the apostles touched a real body and the risen Jesus said he was real but he couldn't for there was no such evidence and none of the apostles were saying there was – if it was that bad for a risen Jesus then what was it like for a historical Jesus?

The critics did not believe anybody who said that the risen Jesus was a man and that was what Paul was trying to get them to believe. And he was trying to do it without relevant evidence for there was none. He was afraid to contradict the other apostles and invent some.

The gospel story that Jesus had been eating after his resurrection and letting women feel him was obviously not concocted yet. This story would have been verified and promoted by Paul in order to convince the heretics if he had heard of it even if

the heretics were just denying the resurrection full stop for touch and sight are often better than sight alone.

Perhaps Paul believed that this dying and rising Jesus was a pantheistic dying and rising entity that was one person with the Church. He does say that the Church is the body of Christ, parts of Christ, and he certainly means it more than as a symbol for he raves on about it. Perhaps the heretics were saying then that the resurrection wasn't real but was a symbol. They could have been believing the same thing all along but just misunderstanding. It is like a priest who believes the bread and wine at communion are the body and blood of Christ and who keeps calling them symbols. He could be misunderstood by somebody who doesn't realise that in Catholic teaching that the bread and wine are literally changed but are symbols at the same time.

It is a possibility that since Paul said such strange things to defend the resurrection such as that we are inevitably lost if Jesus has not risen is that the resurrection was not a historical event but a mystical one. Paul and his heretics could have been saying the same thing and misunderstood one another. Paul could have been a Gnostic, a person who sees the resurrection as a mystical enlightenment that gives knowledge of salvation, for he was undoubtedly a mystic. He could have believed that the visions of Jesus and the resurrection were just symbols from God to give a glimpse of something so abstruse and paradoxical that it could not be put into words. The resurrection in this view would mean a change in our status with God and his accepting us out of spiritual death. That alone would explain why Jesus not rising would be such a disaster. Had it been a historical event that never happened there would still be the room for hope that another would save us by his resurrection. But the resurrection is really about God changing the status of Jesus who is raised from some kind of mystical death to a mystical resurrection so that Jesus can save us for he is the Son of God. We and Jesus are connected so that we rise with him after dying with him (Romans 6). In some sense, we are one person with this Jesus. That is why it has to be him and nobody else for nobody else is us. Silly yes but a lot of ancients thought that way.

If the crucifixion was a mystical and non-literal event and so was the resurrection that would have been good for the early Church leaders. Much hostile attention be avoided. The crucifixion and resurrection described something very mystical and strange and otherworldly. The concept of God is strange so why not? It is certain that the claim of some that if Christianity had been invented the crucified saviour would not have been invented for it was too offensive is itself disproven by the Bible one way or another.

In this view, the difference between Paul and the heretics was an imagined one. They did not realise that they were on the same wavelength because they expressed themselves differently and misunderstood one another. I think Paul did not believe that Jesus died and rose on this earth but died and rose in another and that this was physical in some sense. But the death and resurrection of Jesus could have been in his Church for he was a pantheistic deity.

