

9. Afterlife

Heaven and Part 1 Hell

(Part 2 covers our bodies after death)

The idea of a Hell whereby beings are endlessly tortured, is so monstrous and unpalatable, skeptics use it to justify unbelief and reject Christianity. Therefore I have a radical, sensible alternative. As a Christian I completely reject that absolutely repugnant concept of infinite punishment, yet also thoroughly reject the concept of universal salvation. I provide overwhelming evidence and logic for the doctrine of Annihilation-ism.

Two Major Positions

Concepts of Hell pervading ancient mythology suggests that this concept is common sense, rather than being fictitious. Rejecting the idea of hell altogether disregards justice, having people sinning limitlessly without ever facing God. Hell is not only the grave; Christian scripture has two hells. Sometimes the Greek word Hades, denoting the grave or departed state, is translated into the English word hell. Other times the Greek word Gehenna is translated “hell.” Gehenna was originally a valley where children were burned alive as sacrifices to the idol Moloch. Since this place was abhorred, it later became a garbage dump for dead bodies where fires continually burned to quell the ongoing putrefaction.

Since universalism or denial of punishment in the hereafter is completely foreign to Christian history, I shall discuss it no further. However, besides the majority position of infinite punishment, there is annihilation-ism: the volitionally lost experience hell (Gehenna), and suffer the full punishment of their sins, until they are totally consumed, figuratively incinerated.

Annihilation-ism in the Early Church

Some early Christians were Annihilationists. Renowned early Church father and Annihilationist Clement I (AD 30-101) had the honor of completing the last section of the *Didache (Apostolic Constitutions)*. These writings claim to have been written by the apostles, specifically stating which apostles wrote them. That demonstrates Clements’ intimate fellowship and knowledge of the Apostles. Actually, Clement was Peter’s immediate disciple, and Peter ordained him (*Clements’ Epistle to James* chapters 1-2). Late-dating the aforementioned writings to the third and fourth centuries would essentially be calling the authors liars. Thankfully, subsequent scholarship espouses first century authorship.

Amongst earliest writings, the *Apocalypse of Peter* supported Annihilation-ism, and was so popular over several centuries, it was almost canonized as Scripture’s last book, before John’s Apocalypse (or Revelation) won out. Many believe that Peter’s Apocalypse teaches infinite punishment, with its lurid descriptions of ongoing hellish tortures. But Peter’s Apocalypse, which only survives in fragments (most divergent copies lack an end), has Jesus revealing Annihilation to Peter at its conclusion. Proof that this work existed by the early second century is its mention by Clement of Alexandria (AD 180) who considered it Holy Scripture.

“It is the Father of all who imparts continuance forever on those who are saved. But he who rejects God’s grace deprives himself of continuance forever” (*Irenaeus Against Heresies Book II Chapter XXXIV*; AD 185). Also, “for they [the lost] are cast in, and being annihilated, pass away in everlasting destruction” (*Arnobius Against the Heathen Book II Chapter XIV*; AD 300).

What Popularized Infinite Punishment?

Ideally our motivation to obey God should be great love for Him, but if we cannot muster that, fear of damnation is a great place to start. Precious little is said about hell's termination, souls finding relief, because the point is to drive the fear of God into us.

Numerous early Church Fathers alluded to infinite punishment, but didn't elaborate on it, apparently not thinking it through. I cannot fathom anyone deeply contemplating eternal torment without cauterizing their feelings. Furthermore, Hellenism, Greek culture and philosophy), was a dominant influence throughout the first century world. According to Hellenistic philosophical tradition, human souls are inherently immortal, as opposed to conditional immortality. That is, true immortality belongs to God alone, who graciously shares His nature as a gift. Hence the first major slide toward infinite punishment.

The most prolific writer and arguably greatest among early Church fathers, Origen (AD 165-254), was an Annihilationist. Unfortunately, he added the extreme notion that Christ would return to be crucified a second time for demons and lost men. In reactionary outrage towards his beliefs deemed heretical, at the Fifth Ecumenical Council, Constantinople II, AD 553, Emperor Justinian (who was not a church leader, he simply controlled everyone) pronounced condemnations against Origen, including "If anyone says that the punishment of demons and impious men is only temporary, and that demons and hopelessly lost men will be saved, let him be accursed." Since Annihilation-ism and Origen's extraneous ideas became viewed as inextricably linked, naturally people disabused themselves of that. This is the second major turning point.

The third came from Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, 1307-1321.(1) In Dante's *Inferno*, men are tortured and re-tortured endlessly, like DVD players perpetually looped on replay. In hell's lowest level, the gigantic Devil, encased waist down in ice, devours freezing men headfirst. An earlier version of mythology had in this scenario, Pluto, god of the underworld, in Satan's place. From this source, Infinite Punishment's macabre popularity skyrocketed.

Infinite Torture Advocates Attack

Many infinite punishment folks condemn Annihilationists from one reference alone. Scripture does have Jesus using the same word, often translated *eternal* to quantify both Heaven's reward and Hell's punishment. Yet consider Galatians 6:5 everyone shall bear his own burden, while in Matthew 11:29-30, we must bear Christ's burden. So identical words can have different meanings. Concerning hell lasting "forever," certain aspects of the Old Covenant were also said to last "forever," yet were entirely replaced by the New Covenant. My point is, hanging onto individual words when trying to prove something from Scripture often fails.

Furthermore, I've chosen not to inundate this commentary with a plethora of Scripture quotes, and only use Scripture sparingly. Both camps have quoted barrels of Scripture to mirror their positions, often quoting the exact same verses, tilting each one to reflect their own view.

Some Annihilationists poorly argued that fire consumes and incinerates, it doesn't endlessly torment its victims. Infinite torture advocates pounced, noting that demons, being bodiless spirits, cannot be hurt by fire. Therefore it cannot be literal, and "Annihilationist heresy is disproved." Not so fast! The lake of fire and brimstone is certainly figurative, couched in terms we can understand. But saying that Almighty God cannot end the existence of any spirit He created is blasphemous.

Infinite torture advocates also use the logical fallacy of guilt by association, noting that various false teachers and false religions propose Annihilation-ism. This could also backfire, since all Islamic terrorists believe in infinite punishment. So infinite torture advocates prove nothing. And since most people believe what they want to believe, I'm wary of those who are adamant about infinite punishment. Perhaps they're secretly cruel and vindictive.

Annihilation-ism and Logic

My general argument, along with other Christians throughout history, is that Scripture pictures the lost punished eternally, but not their enduring it. They suffer eternal punishment by being eternally deprived of Heaven. That is the same way the elect experience eternal redemption; they don't undergo an eternal process of redemption. Destroyed forever or irreparably destroyed, not forever in the process of being destroyed; eternal in that Judgment Day seals one's fate. Besides, finite beings would logically merit finite, not infinite, punishment. Eastern (or Greek) Orthodoxy, the only major Christian branch utterly devoid of Annihilationism, holds the unorthodox notion that hell will consist of god's love relentlessly raining down on those too hardhearted to receive it, thereby becoming excruciatingly painful. That would give tough love a preposterous new dimension.

Rather, God uses tough love, but it serves a purpose, refining one's character. And since narrow is the way to life, wide the way to destruction (Matt.7:13-14), infinite punishment has unrighteousness and misery dwarfing righteousness and bliss for all eternity. Now contrast that with annihilation-ism, wherein regardless how many lost, and regardless hell's duration, the time would amount to a teardrop in eternity's ocean, God eventually purifying His universe and fulfilling His joyful purpose. Moreover, most people wouldn't even want their worst enemy to suffer infinite punishment. Must we suppose that peevish, sinful man is more merciful than God? God forbid. So don't let infinite torture, counterproductive to Christ's message, prevent you from embracing Him.

Some Musings

Nobody can say exactly what "Heaven" or "Hell" will be like. The words themselves are not precise theological terms, but often generic slang terms simply denoting good and bad fates. Scripture's descriptions of Heaven are all merely symbolic representations. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into man's heart, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (Corinthians 2:9). However, non-Christian ideas of Heaven often involve men being rewarded with endless sexual pleasure or becoming gods over a paradise world. This insinuates that such beliefs are man-made since they cater to men's fleshly desires, while Christian ideas of Heaven involve men being spiritually united with and subservient to God eternally. Its counterintuitiveness reflects true spirituality.

That Heaven will be wonderful and Hell will be terrible is all we must know. Perhaps it would be indescribable in this present realm as color is indescribable to someone who was completely colorblind since birth. Perhaps it's not for anyone to know now, since Christianity is based on faith and trust. Demanding that God reveal everything is like an ant demanding that people explain everything to it. For Christians, since JESUS declared the future reality of Heaven and Hell, that settles that.

Since justice is often lacking in the present life, it's logical that punishments be meted out in the future by super-knowing, righteous God, who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men. Hardly the result of God's peevishness or pettiness, even existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre stated "Hell is other people."⁽²⁾ One's final state will have been largely self-created.

Some organizations have adopted a duty to warn policy, a statement that if someone threatens to harm themselves or others, they will be legally apprehended. And with new fire codes, smoke detectors are installed in numerous rooms, which sometimes malfunction and pierce people's eardrums with a deafening shriek. Yet most believers don't warn people about "the eternal fire," while others act completely unconcerned about their spiritual welfare; unbelievable.

Hell will also be eternal separation from humanity, not a consolation prize of forever living with people. Despite artists depicting damned people piled together, everyone may have their own isolated private hell. For the damned, death is the greatest foe.

Paraphrasing theologian D. A. Carson: “Hell” won’t be a state where people are consigned because they were pretty good blokes, but they just didn’t believe the right stuff. They will be consigned, first and foremost, because they defy their maker, wanting to be at the center of the universe. “Hell” won’t be comprised of people who have already repented, only God isn’t kind enough to let them off. It will be comprised of people *still* wanting to be at the center of the universe, persisting in their God-defying rebellion. For God to react any other way than to condemn such blatant defiance would be to reduce God Himself.³

How can “Heaven” and “Hell” be fixed destinies without contradicting free will? Some choices have permanent consequences, like bringing new life into the world, or murder. Your culmination of bad choices can amount to murdering your soul. Your culmination of good choices, coupled with Christ’s purifying grace, can result in permanent godliness, total purity. Such complete incorruption would never choose corruption, like choosing to never eat a rusty tin can instead of a gourmet meal. No matter who proclaims that most people are Heaven-bound, Jesus clearly stated in Matthew 7:13-14 that narrow is the way to life (Heaven) and wide the way to destruction (Hell). From a lifetime of personally interacting with people and knowing what constitutes Christian living, I speculate that less than one percent of humanity will achieve “Heaven” while the rest choose damnation.

More Musings on Heaven

Heaven, Hell’s wonderful opposite, would be eternal intimacy with God. For those destined for Heaven: “This world is the land of the dying; the next is the land of the living” (Tyron Edwards). “Death is not a foe, but an inevitable adventure” (Sir Oliver Ledge). “Death is the golden key which opens the palace of eternity” (Milton). “Death is the crown of life” (Young). “Death and love are the two wings that bear the kind man to heaven” (Michelangelo).⁴⁻⁸

However, most people might not even like Heaven, considering it a grotesque amount of religion. Living forever with God would completely countermand most people’s priorities. People constantly talk about business, sports, sex, home remodeling, raising children, cars, and spread gossip. But focusing on God is “fanatical.” Why would someone who doesn’t love God become intimately joined with Him, instead of separated from Him?

And why would someone who chooses disconnection from others and doesn’t love them here live with them forever in Heaven? Besides, Heaven isn’t natural. Those welcomed into Heaven would be loved by God so much that they would live with Him forever. However, we’re not God’s sons and daughters any more than the neighbor’s children are ours; only Jesus Christ is the natural son. Anyone else joining God’s immediate family would be like grafting a branch from a thorn-bush into a pine tree. Since Christian living consists of imitating God’s qualities, godliness would require loving others who aren’t our blood relatives, specially loving those without an immediate family who need love the most. Without that, how can anybody achieve Heaven?

Another idea, besides infinite torture, which fosters incredulity and doubt is Heaven being extreme infinite pleasure. This is because everyone has bad qualities and most have good qualities. Again, there is strong reason to believe that ‘Hell’ is temporary punishment for unrepentant sinners who won’t seek forgiveness, nothing more. There is also reason to believe in varying degrees of “Heaven.” Again, Christianity teaches that Heaven is being in God’s presence. Perhaps there are different degrees of His presence. Consider the following analogy:

If God was a star, those who did a splendid job of doing His will throughout their lives might be like an inner planet orbiting the star and receiving its maximum radiance. Those with a passion for God but whose lives were somewhat lacking could be a planet at an average distance, still receiving a healthy amount of radiance. Those whose lives were seriously disordered and whose loyalties were ambivalent, yet whom God still forgives may be likened to a distant planet that receives minimal radiance but is still within the star’s

gravitational range. The lost would be like space debris outside the star's gravitational pull; hence they float away into outer darkness.

Doctrinal Baggage

I deny the existence of Hades, its alleged regions Tartarus and Paradise, and deny the existence of a place of Purgatory. However, I believe in Limbo. Limbo consists of people sashaying under a wooden bar that's progressively lowered while music plays. Believing in literal places engenders unbelief, since you must postulate structures made of spirit material or structures in a fourth or fifth dimension. I likewise deny the existence of Hell; I simply believe that Hell will be God's wrath poured out and the removal of His life-giving qualities, nothing more. I also deny the existence of Heaven as a specific place presently existing in space. Although John 14:2 usually reads "In my Father's house are many *mansions* or *dwelling places*", this is better translated *stations* (positions of status) per *Tatian's Diatesseron Section XLV*.

Intimate union with God is Heaven. Believers should reject outdated notions, which suggest cartoon devils poking people with pitchforks in fiery caverns, or winged people sitting on clouds playing harps. We must embrace our scientific age. Furthermore, going to Paradise, Tartarus, or Purgatory immediately after death contradicts the clear Christian teaching that people will be judged at world's end when Christ returns, not before. It also violates the clear teaching that the separation of the righteous and unrighteous will come when Christ presides as universal judge. Although some early Christians believed in Hadean realms, they may have lacked access to Matthew's gospel and some other scriptures. And trying to pray souls out of purgatory is nonsensical if God is necessarily purging them from residual sin; it would oppose God. For further discussion, see 8.Ghosts? under Ghost Theology verses Disapproving Christian Believers.

Fallen angels in chains of darkness, the crucified thief going to paradise, and other references could be merely figurative statements signifying individual oppression or happiness. Besides, Revelation 6:9-10 says that some righteous souls are not in blissful Paradise; rather, they cry out in discontent. Christ and His apostles did reveal that spirits do not sleep in their bodies after death, but exit them. Yet they did not say what spirits do afterwards.

Purgatory Reexamined

There must be some type of purging, unless God intends to forever perpetuate sinful aspects of His people; suffering on Earth alone doesn't purge everything. And being saved and forgiven are separate issues. Mass murderers who are saved from the capital punishment they deserve and who are forgiven by their victim's relatives never get out of jail free.

Origen explained that Corinthians 3:10-15 referred to purging from sin. Ministers are the context of chapters 3-4, but all believers should minister in some capacity. To avoid the purgatorial implications of verses 11-15 one must butcher the text. Belief in the final purification of Corinthians 3 should also relieve panicky people, who think they must purify themselves of all sin before they die (although we should try anyway). Simply put, at Judgment everyone will face God's spiritual fire; those who pass the test achieve Heaven, those who fail are damned, and believers who failed in some areas will suffer loss, but survive.

Summarily, every aspect of our lives potentially has eternal consequences. Since our present existence will be over shortly, it is imperative to be prepared for the afterlife. Considering the deadly seriousness and extreme finality of this issue, we must deeply analyze our lives' direction. As Olympic athletes strive, endure, and sacrifice to attain their goal, so must we who seek God.

Part 2 Our Bodies After Death

Near Death Experiences

The phenomenon of near death experiences involve “clinically dead” people who see tunnels of light or have other pleasurable experiences in a place supposedly representing Heaven. Yet centrifuge testing for fighter pilots involved a mechanical device that spun them around, creating increasing levels of accelerated gravitational force to test the threshold of potential pilots’ ability to maintain consciousness. After losing consciousness from blood draining from their head into their lower extremities, many underwent experiences identical to “near death experiences.” All neuroscientists understand that lacking oxygen causes this phenomenon in brains which still retain electrical activity.

According to historic Christianity, *everyone’s* spirit departs their body upon death. Yet most people who were “clinically dead” had no recollection whatsoever of any out of body experience. This also speaks against the notion of near death experiences, since we would expect *everyone* to have those experiences.

Although some non-Christians failed to see their religious leaders such as Buddha and Mohammed, while other non-Christians saw Jesus instead, this is easily explained. Millions of non-Christians are surrounded by Christian culture and imagery, and are thereby subconsciously influenced. And while Christians view Jesus as Almighty God, human leaders from other religions are not considered as important. And Muslims are prohibited from making a physical depiction of Mohammed, which explains why they don’t see his image. Also, if supposed experiences of Jesus and angels giving people accolades were true, we would expect a counterpart to this: a superabundance of experiences where Jesus or angels admonish non-Christians (who have no Christian background) to embrace Christianity.

Furthermore, within the first day of death, blood pools in the body, some body parts becoming dark red, other parts completely paling. Living cells function aerobically and anaerobically; after death, cells only function anaerobically (without oxygen). This facilitates lactic acid production, which gels with myosin, causing rigor mortis, an extreme bodily stiffening. Without these conditions, death hasn’t occurred. Scripture texts about coming back from the dead have Jesus and his apostles reviving people who were dead from one to four days and raising them physically whole and healthy. Jesus Christ promised a general resurrection for all humanity, and that raising the dead comes from God’s power.

So-called “near death experiences” not only distort what arising from the dead entails, it is a dangerous idea. Christ taught that most people are lost; “near death experiences” provide the illusion of most people being saved.

If There Was No Afterlife.....

Many people would be far better off as lower animals, especially me. I would then like to unzip my body, enter my toy poodle, and become her. She’s constantly wagging her tail; apparently happy all the time. The enormous amount of heartbreak and emotional pain, having toiled for years at unfulfilling jobs, endless personal responsibilities, inevitable deterioration that accompanies old age, and constant awareness of death, would render life worse than never having been born. This insight comes from sixteenth century theologian Martin Luther, Who declared that without an afterlife he would rather be a pig than an emperor.

And by the time we gain plenteous knowledge, death closely follows. Gaining knowledge would be a huge waste if our brains were to be discarded. Instead of advancing or being evolved higher creatures, billions would have degenerated into something worse: the ultimate fools. We’d be better off being worms. Yet we instinctively know that is untrue; we have attained something higher. Therefore only a perpetual existence gives our lives meaning. Animals might also have afterlives. Besides, I expect that we who have dealt with overwhelming problems and responsibilities will have additional compensation in the hereafter. That’s the only thing that makes life meaningful and logical

Christ's Bodily Resurrection

JESUS' incarnation, atoning death, and bodily resurrection are Christianity's cornerstone. Quoting pastor Richard Rosinski: "Anything less is non-Christian. Many things [theological non-essentials] are debatable, which is okay and makes us human, but the core essentials can't be debated" [by faithful Christians].¹⁰ Surprisingly, some lackadaisical believers claim Jesus only revived spiritually. Quoting an account of Christ post-death (Luke 24:36-43): "Behold my hands and feet, it is I myself, handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as I have." Jesus declared His mission: "I am the resurrection" (John 11:25).

Jesus Christ's bodily resurrection would sufficiently demonstrate that Christianity is the exclusive Way, Truth, and pathway to Life. Contrarily, if Christ didn't rise from the dead, Christianity shouldn't exist, being founded on a stupendously false claim. Christ's body was never found, moreover, no serious claim of finding His smallest remnant was ever promulgated. In Christ's day, the masses vehemently opposed Christianity as they have in every subsequent century. If Christ's body or remnants thereof existed, they surely would've been discovered by those attempting to refute Christianity. They had two thousand years to do so. Secondly, from the Church's infancy, Christians believed in the resurrection, not giving adequate time for legends or elaborations to develop.

Universal Bodily Resurrection

Surprisingly, most American Christian believers denied that our bodies would be physically resurrected. Perhaps that's from the popular belief that when everyone dies, they immediately become glorified in Heaven or damned to Hell, thereby excluding the physical body. Besides the denial of universal bodily resurrection, some consider it false teaching, hence my elaboration. They emphasize Corinthians 15:50: "Flesh and blood cannot inherit God's Kingdom." I agree, the body itself is what is inherited. The bridegroom Christ Jesus comes and takes her. Human bodies, no longer flesh and blood, are transformed. Other lines of reasoning are as follows: In Corinthians chapter 15, the corruptible must put on immortality, and corruption must put on incorruption, not be discarded. Bodies are also likened to planted seeds. And resurrection in Corinthians 15 was translated from the Greek anastasis, meaning a standing up again. Something cannot stand again unless it fell asleep or collapsed. Spirits, per historic Christianity, depart bodies at death, not sleep in them. The word dead was translated from the Greek nekros, having only one meaning, namely, dead body. This word spawned such English words as necrophobia and necrosis.

Other analogies to resurrection abound, such as night into day, winter into spring, and caterpillars into butterflies. And Corinthians chapter 1 states that God's glory shines forth and is perfected in weakness. Since spirits have no weakness or baseness, that leaves the human body.

Jesus Christ, the Great Physician, healed flesh and raised dead bodies. If the Resurrection was only spiritual, it would be requisite that after raising the dead, bodies should be shown lying by themselves and their spirits living separately. And why not indulge every possible fleshly desire, if our bodies are only temporary shells? Rather, the flesh is regulated and guarded with bodily discipline, since it possesses a hope of salvation.

Paul declared: "He that raised up Jesus Christ from the dead shall quicken (make alive) also your mortal bodies.(Rom.8:11). "He's the savior of the body"(Eph.5:23). "We're members of His body, flesh, and bones (Eph.5:30). In Acts chapter 17, the ancient Greeks mocked Paul for proclaiming the resurrection. They would not mock the immortality of people's spirits since the Greeks embraced that concept. Paul must have been proclaiming bodily resurrection, which the Greeks denied.

Historic Jewish and Christian theology taught that God formed man's body prior to his soul. God then gave man's body the breath of life, making man a living being, instead of creating human spirits, which then inhabited bodies. Besides, the preexistence of our spirits to our present bodies was condemned as

heresy at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in AD 553 (*Anatemas Against Origin Article I*). Scripture says God IS a spirit but that people HAVE spirits. So something other than a person's spirit is truly them. By process of elimination, their body IS them. Also, fully manifest spirits (ghosts) have been known to bear the human body's image, highlighting its importance, never resembling sheets with eyeballs or blobs of vomit in juvenile movies.

Before mankind's fall from grace, people were supposed to live forever. If people didn't either die or get transfigured bodily into Heaven, Earth would be packed tighter than sardines before long. Bodily redemption and transference solves this conundrum. Analogy: mollusks do not live independently of their shells, which are an integral part of and a natural outcropping of the creature. Mollusks can symbolize the human body and spirit, empty shells can represent dead bodies. This analogy doesn't fit perfectly, since shells and soft parts are both physical, but it's illustrative. No analogy which must rely on physical symbols can adequately represent spirituality because the spiritual realm is currently beyond our comprehension.

Ezekiel 37:1-13 illustrates universal bodily resurrection in explicit and dramatic fashion. God speaks to piles of dry bones, which subsequently come together, followed by human tissue accumulating until there are complete human bodies. God breathes life into the bodies which reanimates them. If we believe that God created life *ex nihilo* (everything from nothing), why be incredulous about reanimation of preexistent matter, since its raw materials already exist? Besides, Scripture refers to death as sleeping, a temporary state. Since spirits have no need of physical sleep, and Christ literally woke dead bodies, falling asleep refers to the body, which shall ultimately be wakened.

Scripture has three distinct terms for a person's essence: body, spirit, and soul. The spirit is the "ghost" without the body; the soul is the body animated by the spirit. Although several difficult passages seem to confuse the terms, over hundreds of passages, each term's meaning is clarified. Using a simple illustration, empty tires represent bodies, compressed air represents spirits, and car tires filled with air are souls. Scripture clearly teaches that the soul, the whole person, is to be redeemed.

Arguments for denying the body's physical resurrection were known and declared serious heresy by early Church fathers such as Justin Martyr, Irenæus, and Tertullian, father of Latin Christianity and disciple of St. John's disciple Polycarp. So those professing Christianity should be consistent with their own religion. Recommended reading: *Irenæus Against Heresies Book V chapters 3-15* (AD 180) and Tertullian's *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* (AD 210). They make their position overwhelmingly clear. Universal bodily resurrection is inextricably connected with the Christian religion, a consistent belief for two millennia. Another misunderstanding of Christianity is supposing that the resurrection will only be physical. 8.Ghosts? deals with human spirits.

Implications of Denying Bodily Resurrection

Unless the body should be saved and continue as part of the person, Christ incarnating via a body would be nonsensical. And if our natural state cannot be restored, then sin has not been overcome. Some who believe that bodies shall be discarded conclude that their physical actions or what they allow their bodies to experience is inconsequential.

Reincarnation, which the Church rejected long ago as heresy, has spirits supposedly hopping from various bodies. That's confusion. For example, a father dies, releasing his spirit, which reenters through a newborn son. So the father becomes his wife's son, and his wife becomes his mother. Spirits allegedly transfer between male and female bodies, potentially obliterating gender roles. Certainly spirits transferring between human and animal bodies is confusing. With every spirit having its own designated body, everyone's role is fixed and unconfused.

Imagine one unborn embryo telling his twin brother embryo in the womb "Our present reality is all that exists, so don't give me your born into a world nonsense." So let's have faith, although we cannot pres-

ently comprehend how God could reassemble and breathe life into disordered and disjointed molecules with our current understanding. If God could only do what we could understand, He would not be God. Rather, His ability to do what is inexplicable to others makes Him God, as many things we do are inexplicable to ants.

Mark 5:38-42: Jesus came to the synagogues ruler's house, seeing people weeping and wailing greatly over a young woman's death. Jesus said "The damsel isn't dead, but sleeps." ("Death is the twin of sleep"-Anonymous). They laughed him to scorn. Yet He took the damsel's hand, saying "Damsel, arise." Straightway the damsel arose and walked, causing them great astonishment.

Unbeliever's Repudiation?

Paraphrasing atheist Bertrand Russell: Ignorant theologians thought that one's body was definitive; it seemingly lasted from day to day and would continually exist throughout eternity by being resurrected. That's definitely false. We now know that bodily matter continually changes through ongoing cell death and birth of completely new cells. We're not even the same person we were several years ago. We also know that atoms themselves have no continuous existence; we cannot say that any one atom is the same one that existed moments ago. Therefore continuity of the body is an illusion.

Not so fast. Consider Mr. Russell's denial that spirits exist and his denial that any part of our body is definitively us. So what's left?; nothing. Essentially, we don't exist. Would Russell contend that if someone committed a crime years ago, he's not guilty today, since it was somebody else? Would he contend that if a couple mated on their wedding night, they are committing adultery with a stranger if they are still married five years later? And why is there a gravesite to memorialize Bertrand Russell, since that essentially says that here lies a particular person? So his contention is simply a clever device to attack Christianity. Apparently, God will decide which atoms and molecules represent us, and transform them for His purpose. Not fully understanding it humbles us, encouraging us to trust God. So, "Is death the last sleep? No, it is the last and final awakening." (Walter Scott)¹¹

