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**Luke 24:36-43 and 1 John 3:1-7: Different Viewpoints on
Life After Death**

By

Scott G. Sinclair

In Judaism during the time of Jesus there were different viewpoints about life after death. The Sadducees clung to the earlier view that there was no individual survival after death. Only one's family or Israel as a nation continued to exist, not the individual. By contrast, the Pharisees looked forward to the resurrection of the body. On some future date God would reconstitute the physical remnants of our dead bodies and restore them to life. Other Jews, influenced by Greek philosophy, believed in the immortality of the soul. Our physical bodies would die permanently, but a mysterious dimension of ourselves would survive because it was not physical but spiritual and, therefore, indestructible.

The same viewpoints persist today. Even now one can find people who believe that death is the end of an individual. One can also find fundamentalists who still hope for a physical resurrection of the dead on some future date. Belief in the immortality of the soul remains popular among liberal Christians.

There were and still are serious problems with each of these viewpoints. The belief that there is no individual survival after death may be intellectually plausible but is an ethical and religious disaster. If death is the end, there is neither hope nor accountability. If there is nothing after death, there is no lasting hope for anything. Not only do individuals always die; so too do nations. Even all life will ultimately perish when the sun in a couple billion years explodes and destroys the earth. If death is the end, there is always the temptation to cheat now, because we may get away with our misdeeds until we die. If we do, we will never have to answer for the evil that we commit. The belief in the future reconstitution of the body and the physical resurrection of our remains has never been plausible and has become less so as time has passed. How is even God going to reassemble our fully decayed bodies, especially if part of them now belongs to the bodies of other human beings? The question of whether it will be cannibals or the people they ate who will rise from the dead on judgment day remains more than a joke. Of course, as centuries passed and the day for the dead to rise from their graves never came, the plausibility of a coming universal physical resurrection has become increasingly less. Finally, there is no evidence that we each have an indestructible soul. Where is this soul, and how can it be indestructible?

For Christians the primary proof for the existence of life after death was and is the resurrection of Jesus. There was never any debate in the early church over whether there was life after death. There had to be life after death, because Jesus was human like us, and he rose from the dead. Therefore, we too will rise from the dead. We see that reasoning clearly in this morning's epistle. "We will

be like him.”

The resurrection of Jesus provides both hope and accountability. The epistle goes on to say, “We will see him as he is.” Yes, there is hope. We will be with Jesus, the same Jesus who proclaimed love for all, even sinners. Yet, there is also accountability. The Jesus whom we will see is the same Jesus who exhorted us to love others and engage in self-sacrifice. The epistle continues, “All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.”

In the gospels when the risen Jesus appears to the disciples, he has some sort of physical body but not exactly the physical body that we possess in this present life. Thus, in today's reading from Luke's Gospel Jesus insists that he is not a spirit. “A spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” Yet the risen body of Jesus is also very different from our present bodies. The body of the risen Christ can suddenly appear and disappear and even enter a room that is locked.

There is much about life after death that has always been unknowable. In the first century the author of today's epistle could write: “What we will be has not yet been revealed.” Today some aspects of life after death still remain a mystery.

Nevertheless, there have been two recent developments which shed some light. The first is that we now know that human consciousness comes from an energy field, and we know that an energy field can be sent wirelessly to somewhere else. Our thoughts and emotions come from our brains, and our brains produce them through electronic impulses rushing through nerves. Our spiritual selves are a complex electronic field. Thanks to modern technology we now also know that an electronic field containing thoughts and feelings can be transmitted wirelessly to another place. We ourselves do this all the time through email. We record our thoughts and feelings and send them electronically to someone else. The second recent development is near death out-of-body experiences. Thanks to modern medicine, it is frequently possible to revive people after they are clinically dead, that is after their hearts have stopped beating and even their brain waves have become flat. Such people often report that they left their bodies and went through some sort of tunnel and on the other side met their deceased friends and relatives and then encountered a loving Being of Light. The Being of Light showed them everything that they had ever done and how it affected other lives. The deceased were proud of their good deeds and ashamed of their destructive ones.

On the basis of these two developments, we have a plausible model for our own resurrection. At death, our bodies so to speak push the send button and our

electronic field, that is all our thoughts, memories, feelings and so forth, all that we psychologically and spiritually are depart. We then go to be with those who died before us. We also go to God for something that we might describe as a final judgment.

This modern model for life after death strikingly confirms what the gospels already suggested. There is life after death; we still will have something that could be called a body, but a very different body from the one which we have now. In this understanding of life after death there is hope and accountability. There is hope because we will see a loving God, accountability, because this God will reveal the entire truth about our past, and we will have to face it.

Let us, therefore, heed the advice of today's epistle based on Jesus's resurrection: "All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure."