

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## One Resurrection: For Just and Unjust

*But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.*  
(Acts 24:14-15, KJV 1900)

These verses are from Paul's defense before Felix. An "orator" named Tertullus represented the high priest and the Jewish case against Paul. Paul spoke for himself. Rather than dealing with their actual differences of belief, Tertullus followed the sinful path of attacking the messenger when he couldn't deal with the message. He hurled various false accusations against Paul. Paul didn't view his faith as a personal philosophy that required his reputation or his ego to defend. "For we preach not ourselves...." (2 Corinthians 4:5) He ignored the accusations and went directly to the heart of the gospel. The Jews rejected Jesus and the gospel that Paul preached, but he firmly associated Jesus and the gospel with the Old Testament law and the prophets. Only after he had affirmed the doctrine of Jesus and the resurrection did Paul respond to the personal accusations against him. His first concern was not what those people said against Him, but what they said against his Lord and His truth.

Implied in this scenario is the tactic that first century Jews practiced against the church, accuse them of starting a new religion. When the Romans conquered a people, they fully tolerated the religion of that people. However, they were fiercely set against any new religion, so, if someone started a new religion, the Romans would stamp it out. If the Jews could convince the Romans that Christianity was a new religion, Rome would take care of the Christians. Paul understood this tactic and rejected it. He rejected it on solid ground. It was first century Jews, not the Christians, who had forsaken Moses and the prophets of the Old Testament. In the second century, the Jews continued this tactic, trying to convince the Romans that Christians were a new religion that Rome should fear and eliminate by brute force. Justin Martyr's *First Apology* (ca mid-second century) addresses this same accusation. Justin devotes the greater portion of his apology to proving that Christianity is actually a very old religion, not a new one. "Apology" as used by Justin refers to the historical use of the word, such as appears in the field of Christian study that focuses on defending the faith. Justin, as Paul in his speech to Felix, defended the faith against false charges from its enemies.

Paul affirms that he worships the God of his fathers, the Jewish people, and that he believes

and teaches the same things that Moses and the prophets taught, what first century Jews claimed to believe, but didn't. Long before Paul, Jesus confronted the Jews for rejecting Moses and the prophets, so Paul simply followed Jesus in his defense before Felix.

*...there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.* In fact, the Pharisees of the first century believed in life after death and in a literal, bodily resurrection. The Sadducees, who often occupied the highest positions of authority in Jewish government, at times including the office of high priest, as strongly rejected life after death and a literal, bodily resurrection. Though the Sadducees were likely in the minority in terms of numbers, they held significant influence in political power. There can be little doubt that Paul well knew that he introduced a divisive topic when he focused on the resurrection in this gathering. However, the passage gives no indication that he played the political game for his personal interest. He spoke the truth to honor his Lord, not play political games.

Elder Ben Winslett recently published a brief article in which he observed the fatal impact on a church of its leaders trying to "Manage" the church based on commonly accepted business practices. The Lord's church is not a business that operates for profit or for the ego boost of its leaders. Such a carnal philosophy will kill a church in short order. I would add that trying to "Manage" a church based on commonly accepted political practices and attitudes is equally deadly to a church. When the disciples slipped into a carnal moment by disputing which of them would be the leader, Jesus confronted them with the one right principle of church leadership. If you want to lead in church, work at serving, not at bullying or domineering your ideas over others in the church. (Luke 22:24-27) Peter affirms the same principle, not "...as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:3) Any strategy or attitude that attempts to control people in a church that exceeds this principle, a Christ-like, gracious example--show the way by your feet, not by your words alone--contradicts this Biblical model. Many years ago I was meeting with the two men who were our church's deacons at the time. Wholly

apart from the reason for our meeting, one of them spoke up, "Joe, how may we help you in your work?" I was deeply touched by this true servant's heart and spirit. "How may I help you?" is a far more Biblical mindset than a privately thought "How may I manipulate them to my way of thinking?"

A frustrated pastor may grow weary of seeing people leave his church and return to the world. What pastor would not? However, for a pastor facing this dilemma to alter his doctrinal preaching, shifting from solid grace to threats or questions about the person's eternal standing is inexcusable. "If you depart, I can't give you any assurance that you are born again." This sentiment in a pastor falsely usurps the position of assurer that the Holy Spirit claims in Scripture. The strategy is as much a manipulative control tactic as a doctrinal issue, though it is an unsound doctrinal issue. At its heart, this and any similar manipulative or control strategy that people in leadership positions in a church practice beyond their gracious godly example contradicts Jesus' words to the disciples and Peter's word to his readers.

Paul introduced the core facts of the gospel to Felix with no regard for his personal gain or loss. He preached Jesus whose coming and work fulfilled literally hundreds of Old Testament prophecies and all the legitimate types that God inserted into the Old Testament Scriptures to foreshadow His coming and work. The crowning glorious principle of both Old Testament teaching and of Paul's preaching was one, Jesus and the resurrection.

Most modern teaching regarding the end times is so complicated and confusing that you must often struggle to find just a few men who actually agree on all the details. In admirable contrast, Scripture's teaching on end times is gloriously simple and comforting for tired, struggling pilgrims looking forward to home. There shall be one resurrection that includes both just and unjust. Paul mirrors Jesus' teaching. (John 5:28-29) There shall be one hour when all the dead, just and unjust, shall arise. Neither Jesus nor Paul taught multiple resurrections or comings, some secret and some public. When Paul outlined these principles to the Thessalonian Church, he concluded his teaching with "Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (1Thessalonians 4:18) The doctrine of the Lord's final and glorious return appears in Scripture to comfort children of grace, not for intellectual challenges beyond the ordinary believer's ability to unravel or to understand.

Our study passage also distinguishes Paul's teaching on the resurrection contrasted with the Pharisees or other Jews who believed in the resurrection. "...which they themselves also allow." They "allowed" the idea of resurrection, but apparently it didn't form the bedrock of their belief. While they "allowed" the idea of a resurrection, Paul believed that "...**there shall be** a resurrection." For Paul, the resurrection was not an optional belief that one could rightly take or leave, or simply "allow."

To deny the resurrection puts one outside the pale of orthodox and accepted faith. The word "Resurrection" literally defined requires the return to life of a literal, physical body that died. It cannot be fulfilled by a mere mystical or immaterial energizing. Thus, folks who claim to believe the Bible, but also deny the Bible's teaching of a literal, physical, bodily resurrection, must make a credible case that every appearance of the word "Resurrection" in its various forms in Scripture are symbolic, something that cannot be done.

In our present culture, people may claim to believe just about anything they imagine about Jesus and carry on their life without interference or persecution, so long as they don't make too much noise about it. We are increasingly facing greater threats against outspoken Christians who hold to historical, Biblical definitions of Christian faith. For Paul, speaking out boldly about Jesus and the resurrection before a Roman governor could possibly have cost him his life. Yet he spoke with boldness. This truth was just that important, that central to right faith for Paul. He could not compromise or downplay this truth. A few years ago, I had a sadly enlightening discussion with a pastor from a different denomination. He spoke of his belief in the historical, Biblical teaching of the resurrection. But then he mentioned the strong and often emotional reaction of many Christians who hold to one of the various dispensational views of the Second Coming. For him, given the emotional static, preaching Biblical truth about the Second Coming and the final resurrection was more costly than he was willing to invest. He chose to merely sidestep or downplay his belief in the resurrection. I cannot imagine Paul taking such a posture. In fact, our study passage and the consistent New Testament record contradict such an idea.

Often we miss the rich depth of Scripture's teaching by overlooking the simplest of points. In Paul's words here, two such points stand out. Paul uses the singular form of the word, "resurrection," not "resurrections." Secondly, in the one resurrection of which he speaks, Paul specifically states that both just and unjust shall arise. Again, the simple and comforting truth of Scripture leads us to view the Lord's final return and resurrection of all humanity in the clearest and simplest of terms. Paul's words will not allow the idea of a secret resurrection of elite believers only. He states that this one resurrection shall witness the raising of both just and unjust. As taught in Scripture, the doctrine of the resurrection can be understood and can comfort little children facing death, as well as seasoned saints. Thank the Lord!

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Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor