



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 139

Exaltation of Christ – Reformed theology identifies four stages in the exaltation of Christ – His resurrection, ascension, session at the right hand of God, and physical return in final judgment and glory at the last day. The key passage on this is Philippians 2:9-11. The humiliation and exaltation of Christ are inseparably linked. The exaltation of Christ is the outcome of His humiliation. Jesus Christ having been perfectly obedient to the will of the Father, having accomplished the demands of the law, and having received upon Himself the curse of the law, merited salvation for His people, and was no longer subject to death and the curse of the law, and thus was rewarded by the Father for His perfect obedience.

Resurrection – The Bible is clear that the resurrection of Christ was not a revival to regular human life, as had happened to others before Him (Luke 8:54-55; John 11:1-4), who eventually would have died again. Rather, it was a restoration to a higher order of life. The human body and spirit of Christ were reunited and transformed into a glorified human nature. If this were not the case then Paul could not have referred to Christ as “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23).

Nature of Christ’s resurrection – In 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 Paul contrasts two kinds of bodies, the first he explains as being perishable, dishonorable, and weak; and the second, as imperishable, that is, no longer subject to disease, death and decay, but one that will be immortal; as glorious, that is, no longer fallen and shameful due to sin, but one that will be splendidly honorable and righteous; and as powerful, that is, no longer subject to infirmities, wants and temptations, but one that will be made perfect and strong, able to live eternally. He summarizes this in verse 44 by saying, “It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.” Paul is not saying that one is physical and the other non-physical, instead, he is saying that one is suited for life in this temporary present age, in this world (natural), whereas the resurrected body will be suited for life in the eternal age to come, in the new heavens and new earth (spiritual). Another important point is that though there will be a remarkable transformation, the body raised is in essence the same body that was sown. The Bible does not talk about the raised body having the same exact particles as the body that died, rather it is referring to them being the same in essence or identity (1 Corinthians 15:35-38). There will be a discontinuity but also a vital continuity between them.

Just as Adam’s body was the prototype of our natural body, so Christ’s body is the prototype of our future spiritual body (v. 49; Philippians 3:20-21). Christ’s resurrected body was in essence the same body in which He died. Christ’s body on earth was mortal, subject to the same human limitations and weaknesses in this life; and though it was not marred by sin, it was under the curse of the law. With His resurrection, Christ’s body underwent a significant change, becoming a spiritual body, eternal, and imperishable; endowed with power and new qualities; perfect and fit for life in the heavenly state.

Christ’s resurrected body was a human physical body, it occupied space, and appeared as a physical body (Luke 24:15-18, 28-29); it could be touched (Matthew 28:9); and it could eat food (Luke 24:42-43; John 21:12-13); thus confirming that He was not a ghost or a vision, but truly human in form and its properties (Luke 24:39). Also it retained identifying features from the dead body, proving that in essence it was the same body (John 20:27). On the other hand, we read that Jesus was not clearly recognized by His disciples immediately (Luke 24:16; John 20:14-16; 21:4); also it seems to have been able to appear and disappear suddenly (Luke 24:31, 36; John 20:19); to travel great distances quickly (Luke 24:31, 34, 36); and to move through solid objects (John 20:7, 19, 26). This confirms that Jesus’ body had gone through a glorious change, which did involve some change in His physical appearance; however, we need to be careful not to think that His appearance was something totally different, and His raised body totally unrelated to His body which died. On some of these points the Bible does not provide enough details for us to come to definitive conclusions about any such new properties of the glorified physical body. The resurrection of Christ serves as the greatest guarantee of our future physical resurrection.