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Volume XVII
Issue 423

The Rich Man and Lazarus:

Literal or Figurative?

by — Joseph E. Kirk (1904-1974)

What is death? Where are the dead? What assurance does God give concerning the future of the dead? What did Jesus Christ mean when He said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life"?

The sincere and careful student seeking to ascertain the truth concerning death revealed in the Scriptures will be troubled when he finds that the Scriptures seem to contradict themselves on this important subject. For example, there are many passages which teach: that the dead are asleep in their graves; that there is no consciousness during death; that God's way of ending death is by means of resurrection.

On the other hand, there are a few passages which seem to teach that the dead are alive and conscious prior to their resurrection. The strongest passage which can be found in the Bible to support this idea is in Luke 16 which contains the account of *The Rich Man and Lazarus* in Hades.

The question which has to be settled in the mind of every believer is this: Did the Lord Jesus use figurative language when He described the condition of the Rich Man and Lazarus after they died, or did He speak the literal truth? When He said that Lazarus was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom, was He speaking literally or figuratively?

There are at least **seven strong reasons** for believing that what our Lord said about the state of the Rich Man and Lazarus after their deaths was meant to be taken figuratively and not literally.

1. That the Rich Man and Lazarus actually lived on earth need not be questioned. However, it should be remembered that the Lord Jesus distinctly states that they both died. Once this simple fact is recognized, it becomes impossible to believe that they could be both physically dead and physically alive at the same time. Yet even while they are dead they are represented as being alive in bodies. The tongue and eyes of the Rich Man and the tip of the finger of Lazarus are mentioned.

The fact that the Lord distinctly states that both the Rich Man and Lazarus died, then immediately represents them as being physically alive, proves that what He says concerning them in Hades is meant to be taken figuratively and not literally.

2. In Luke 16, the Lord Jesus represents Abraham as being alive in Hades. In Luke 20:27-40 the Lord makes it plain to the Sadducees, who did not believe in resurrection, that Abraham *is dead*, and that God is not the God of the dead. He makes it clear that before God can again be the God of Abraham, he must raise Abraham from the dead. The fact that Abraham is actually dead awaiting resurrection proves that the Lord's reference to him as being alive prior to resurrection is meant to be taken figuratively and not literally.

3. From Genesis to Revelation the Scriptures teach that

(see *LAZARUS*, page 3783)

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Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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This free weekly electronic publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

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LAZARUS (continued from front page)

the dead are asleep until resurrection. Those who limit this sleep to the body do so in direct contradiction to the statements of Scriptures which make it clear that the sleep of death is of the person, not just of the body. In Luke 16 the Rich Man and Lazarus are represented as being awake in bodies immediately after it is made clear that they have died. The fact that the dead are asleep until resurrection proves that when the Lord refers to the Rich Man and Lazarus as being awake prior to resurrection, He is speaking figuratively and not literally.

4. In the account of the Rich Man and Lazarus the Lord upholds the authority and the reliability of the writings of Moses and the Prophets. In these writings it is made clear that the dead are dead and that they must be resurrected before they can live again. Moses and the Prophets teach that death is said to be of the person, not just of the body. Many times in the Old Testament the expression occurs, “*he died,*” or “*she died,*” or “*they died.*” Often the name of a person is given followed by the statement that “*he died.*” For example, Abraham died, Isaac died, Joseph died, David died (Genesis 25:8; 35:29; 50:26; Acts 2:29).

If the words of the Lord Jesus concerning the condition of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Hades are taken literally, everything that was revealed to Moses and the Prophets concerning the state of the dead must be discarded as unreliable. To do so is to deny the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures. If the words of the Lord concerning the state of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Hades are taken figuratively, then there is harmony and agreement throughout the Scriptures on this important subject.

5. To make the words of the Lord Jesus concerning the Rich Man and Lazarus in Hades literal is to make Him contradict all that God had previously revealed about the state of the dead in Sheol or Hades.

Sheol of the Old Testament and Hades of the New Testament are identical in meaning. This is proven by the fact that when an Old Testament passage which speaks of Sheol is quoted in the New Testament, the Greek word Hades is used to represent the Hebrew word Sheol. This may be verified by comparing the *Revised Version* of Acts 2:25-28 with Psalm 16:8-11.

Concerning Sheol and death the Scriptures declare,

For Sheol cannot praise Thee, death cannot celebrate Thee. They that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth (Isaiah 38:18).

By inspiration of God the Prophet David wrote,

For in death there is no remembrance of Thee: In Sheol who shall give Thee thanks? (Psalm 6:5).

In the upright words of truth we are told,

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Sheol, whither thou goest (Ecclesiastes 9:10; 12:10).

In addition to all of this, the dead are said to be SILENT in Sheol:

Let the wicked ... be silent in Sheol (Psalm 31:17, R.V.).

The dead praise not Jehovah, neither any that go down into silence (Psalm 115:17, R.V.).

In Luke 16 Abraham and the Rich Man are represented as carrying on a conversation loud enough to hear each other, though they were separated by a great distance.

The literal truth concerning Sheol having been clearly made known, it was perfectly proper for the Lord to refer to Sheol or Hades in a figurative manner. This He did beyond a shadow of doubt.

Elsewhere, our Lord Himself taught that the dead do not live until resurrection (Revelation 20:4-6). The Rich man of Luke 16 is included among those of whom the risen Son of God declares “*the rest of the dead do not live until the thousand years should be finished.*” Then, in order that they may be judged they are raised from the dead (Revelation 20:11-15).

6. In Luke 16, after making it clear that the Rich Man and Lazarus have both died, the Lord immediately represents them as being alive and possessing bodies. To take this literally is to deny the need for resurrection.

(see LAZARUS, page 3786)

One Layer at a Time: The Unfolding of God

by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

Throughout the course of time, with great drama and intrigue, God is telling His Own story. On the stage of human history He unfolds the revelation of Himself. At the forefront is the work and ministry of His Son.



and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him (Matthew 11:27).

The Son is the “Image” of His Father (Colossians 1:15). The Father and the Son do not have counter-purposes.

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath **declared Him** (John 1:18).

Then answered Jesus and said unto them, “Verily, verily I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do: for whatever things He does, these also do the Son likewise. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that Himself does” (John 5:19-20).

The word *exēgeomai*, which is translated “declared” in the *King James Version*, is defined as “unfold” (Strong, Thayer) and is thus translated in the *Concordant Version* as,

He **unfolds** Him.

To know more about the Father, one must know more about the work and ministry of His Son.

Jesus said unto him, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet have you not known, Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; and how do you say then, ‘Show us the Father?’” (John 14:9).

All things are delivered unto Me of My Father: and no man knows the Son, but the Father; neither knows any man the Father, save the Son,

The pinnacle of the progressive revelation of God throughout the Scriptures is Christ Jesus’ disclosure through Paul. As we attend to this unfolding, we watch as God grows increasingly larger (from our viewpoint).

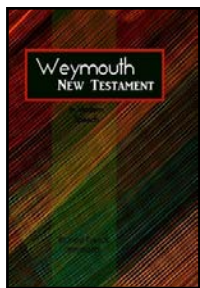
Paul’s desire and prayer for the members of the Body of Christ is for us to grow in our “realization of God.”

Therefore we also, from the day on which we hear, do not cease praying for you and requesting that you may be filled full with the realization of His will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, you to walk worthily of the Lord for all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and **growing in the realization of God** (Colossians 1:9-10, CV).

Therefore, I also, on hearing of this faith of yours in the Lord Jesus, and that for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, making mention in my prayers that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may be giving you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in **the realization of Him** (Ephesians 1:15-17 CV).

This realization of God also involves the realization:

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(see **LAYER**, page 3786)



We had such a wonderful stay with you all, we could not have felt more at home! The kindness and thoughtfulness of all you dear ones overwhelmed us completely. We can never thank you enough for not only making us feel loved and accepted, but also for trusting us enough to share your lives with us. We love you all and hold you close in our hearts as family. Truly, we are members of one body. – **AL**

Bless you and your continued sharing of the truth. The [Daily Email Goodies](#) are the way I like to start off my mornings, spiritually and positively. They help mitigate those stressful days, as I save them and review them when I need a shot in the arm! – **PA**

Love your [Daily Email Goodies](#) and like to share them on Facebook with those who are listed as friends. I know many ignore these posts, but if just

one sees and is blessed by the *Goodies* it is worth it. I live in a small town, 9000 population county-wide with 30 plus churches. A very religious area and very steeped in man's religion. I am alone in the Word rightly divided and properly translated (Reconciliation for all) in this area. Yes, alone, but not alone (Galatians 2:20). Plus I have you all also. God bless you and keep on keeping on. – **IL**

Greetings from Stuttgart. I love your book [KJV – 400 Years of Bondage](#) which my aunt sent me. – **Germany**

Thank you for the continuation of the [Daily Email Goodies](#). They are life-savers in an ocean of huge waves! ... These little "treasures" display a love for Father and Christ that extends around the earth to all of us "far flung," we see this love working for us, in you Clyde, because your messages are filled with beauty and love. – **Australia**

I've been listening to [Bible Student's Radio](#) online for a while now, and I appreciate your teachings very much. – **Kenya** ■

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For Those Who Have Answers
E-mail us for the list of unanswered questions and send us your answers for posting to the list.

LAYER (continued from page 3784)

Of His Son

Unto the end that we should all attain to the unity of the faith and of the **realization of the son of God**, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the complement of the Christ (Ephesians 4:13, CV).

Of His Truth

With meekness training those who are antagonizing, seeing whether God may be giving them repentance to come into a **realization of the truth** (II Timothy 2:25, CV).

Of His Will

Therefore we also, from the day on which we hear, do not cease praying for you and requesting that you may be filled full with the **realization of His will**, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding (Colossians 1:9, CV).

LAZARUS (continued from page 3783)

The teaching of the New Testament does not differ from the teaching of the Old Testament concerning the state of the dead and the absolute necessity for resurrection. Long after His own resurrection the Lord made it clear, through the Apostle Paul, that apart from resurrection there can be no life after death for anyone. In I Corinthians 15:12-19 the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead are inseparably tied together. If Christ has not been raised the rest of the dead will not be raised, and if there is no resurrection “*then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ have perished.*”

7. The last reason we want to call attention to for believing that what our Lord says concerning the Rich Man and Lazarus in Hades is figurative is found in Matthew 13:34.

All these things spoke Jesus in parables unto the multitudes; and without a parable spoke He nothing unto them.

If our Lord did not speak to the multitudes except in parables, then surely His words concerning the Rich Man and Lazarus in Hades must be figurative.

The question arises, if our Lord’s words in this in-

Of His Secret

That their hearts may be consoled, being united in love, and to all the riches of the assurance of understanding, unto a **realization of the secret of the God and Father, of Christ** (Colossians 2:2, CV).

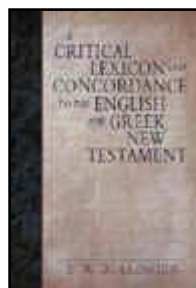
Of Every Good Thing in Us

So that the fellowship of your faith may become operative in the **realization of every good thing which is in us** for Christ Jesus (Philemon 1:6, CV).

As we watch God and His plan unfold, we watch Him grow larger to our perception, and we watch ourselves grow larger too!

Paul writes in Ephesians 2:10 that we are “*His workmanship*” (KJV), “*His achievement*” (CV), His “*Own handiwork*” (WNT). ■

stance are to be taken figuratively, then what literal truth is the Lord teaching? Two obvious things stand out. First, the rich will be requited for their neglect and oppression of the poor, and the poor will be consoled. Second, if men will not heed the words of God given through Moses and the Prophets, neither would they be persuaded by the words of one who came back from the traditional and unscriptural kind of death in which many believe. ■



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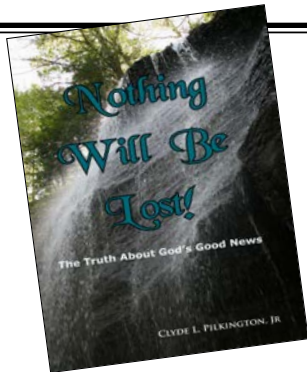


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by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

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