

Third Resurrection

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One of the doctrines that sets the Church of God apart from mainstream Christianity is our understanding of the resurrection. Almost every Christian group believes that when we die, our immortal soul will live on and we will be variously dealt with immediately. Some believe we will all go to heaven. God is merciful and will forgive everyone. Others believe there will be an eternal punishment for the wicked, or even for those who have not “received Christ” and they will be sent to an ever-burning hell to suffer for eternity. And others think that there is an intermediate area called purgatory, where people will suffer for their sins, but will eventually be purged of them and then they will be sent to heaven.

The Church of God, however, not believing in an immortal soul, knows that the scriptures speak instead of a resurrection. More than one in fact. There is the first resurrection, clearly spoken of in Revelation 20:4-6, and described in several places in Revelation. This is the “better resurrection” we read about in Hebrews 11:35, and it takes place before the millennium, some even being changed without actually dying first as we read about in 1 Corinthians 15.

If there is a first resurrection, there must be at least another. And Revelation 20:5 implies that as well when it says “the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished.” We understand this to be a resurrection to physical life. And while I could probably go into quite a bit about either of these resurrections, but especially the more enigmatic second resurrection, that is not what I wish to focus on today. Because in the tradition of the Church, there is yet another resurrection, one that we have come to call the Third Resurrection. And it is this resurrection that I am going to focus on today.

What is this Third Resurrection? There isn't a lot written about it in church literature. There is even less written in scripture. And as a result, details about what it is are pretty sketchy and subjective. But in general, it is looked at as being roughly equivalent to the “second death”, in the sense that those who are in the Third Resurrection are destined for the Lake of Fire, which is the second death according to Rev 20:14. And some even go so far as to say those who are cast into the lake of fire have all come up in the 3rd resurrection, so there is effectively a 1 to 1 correspondence.

So who is in this sad group of people brought up in the 3rd resurrection? Again, details are pretty scarce, but two groups tend to emerge. The first is some of the more incorrigibly wicked. The Adolf Hitlers and Joseph Stalins, to name a few candidates from more recent history. And maybe some of the Pharisees Jesus encountered and didn't mince words over.

The second group is a bit scarier, although we tend to focus on it more, because it consists of those who were called and received God's spirit, and then turned their back on their calling. They have received their judgment, which is now on those who have been called, and they cannot be renewed to repentance, which would be crucifying the Lord all over again and putting Him to an open shame. We all know many who potentially fall into this category, especially those of us who go back to the days of the Worldwide Church of God before the great falling away. Of course, not wanting to believe that these people are all destined for the lake of fire, we generally assume they never were converted, never did receive God's spirit, and therefore never actually received a chance to be in the first resurrection. And this is key. Because the general view is that those who have been called will either be in the first resurrection at Christ's return, or they will have been deemed to have failed and come up in the third resurrection/second death punishment. I know those who have children who have “fallen away”, and who agonize over their fate, fearing that they may have had their chance and will come up in the third resurrection.

So let's look a bit more closely at this resurrection.

Some have asked the question, if someone is already dead, why do they have to be resurrected just so they can be burned up in the Lake of Fire? One of the larger offshoots of Worldwide published an article by a minister who attempted to answer that question. He gave several reasons:

1. Impact of example. Doing so would demonstrate to those who are righteous that sin has serious consequences. And as the wicked are burning up, this lesson is burned into their consciousness. But I ask you, why would those who have already been resurrected to eternal life need that? Does it mean they could yet turn away? Do we really need that to keep from sinning, even after we have received eternal life?
2. Responsibility and Accountability. The wicked need to learn the consequences of their wickedness. Why? They are just going to be put to death. It doesn't do any good for them to learn anything. Not unless they can do something about it, like repent.

So I was not satisfied with these reasons. I'm still not sure why someone needs to be resurrected just to be burned up. But let's go on and see if we can get more clues.

What are some of the scriptures that talk about this 3rd resurrection to the lake of fire?

One that is often cited is the parable of Lazarus and the rich man.

(Luke 16:19-31 NKJV) ""There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. (20) "But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, (21) "desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. (22) "So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. (23) "And being in torments in **Hades**, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. (24) "Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' (25) "But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. (26) 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.' (27) "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, (28) 'for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' (29) "Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' (30) "And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' (31) "But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'""

It says Hades, not Gehenna. What was the rich man guilty of? He wasn't converted. He didn't seem to do all that much other than fail to have compassion on Lazarus. In a case of circular reasoning, that article I mentioned thinks he must have been truly wicked, or he would not have been there. But he doesn't act like it. He asks for compassion, for himself and his brothers. He doesn't ask for the flame to go away, he asks for a small amount of cooling water. Is he really about to be cast into a lake of fire? Or might this be something else. A refining fire, perhaps. In any case, this is a parable, and it is sometimes risky to take the symbols of a parable too literally.

Then there is the passage in Matthew 13: [Furnace of Fire]

(Mat 13:24-30 NKJV) "Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; (25) "but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. (26) "But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. (27) "So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' (28) "He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' (29) "But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. (30) 'Let both grow together until the harvest, and **at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them,** but gather the wheat into my barn.'" ""

(Mat 13:36-50 NKJV) "Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." (37) He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. (38) "The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the **tares are the sons of the wicked one.** (39) "The enemy who sowed them is the devil, **the harvest is the end of the age,** and the reapers are the angels. (40) "Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. (41) "The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, (42) "and will cast them into the **furnace of fire.** There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (43) "Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear! (44) "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. (45) "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, (46) "who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (47) "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, (48) "which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. (49) "So it will be at the **end of the age.** The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, (50) "and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth." ""

Is this "furnace of fire" the Lake of fire? The timing is the end of the age, which is the time of the second coming of Jesus Christ. At that time there is a separation made. I would like to suggest we are looking here at something fulfilled more by the fiery trials of the day of the Lord, after the angels have sealed the "wheat" and thereby separated out the tares, rather than a final judgment of the incorrigibly wicked.

There are 5 other passages dealing with "weeping and gnashing of teeth" In three of them the victims are cast into outer darkness, rather than a furnace of fire. What is that?

(Mat 22:1-14 NKJV) "And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: (2) "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, (3) "and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. (4) "Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle *are* killed, and all things *are* ready. Come to the wedding.'" (5) "But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. (6) "And the rest seized his servants, treated *them* spitefully, and killed *them.* (7) "But when the king heard *about it,* he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. (8) "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. (9) 'Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' (10) "So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding *hall* was filled with guests. (11) "But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. (12) "So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. (13) "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and **cast *him* into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'** (14) "**For many are called, but few *are* chosen.**" ""

When is this? Has someone made it to the Kingdom of God by mistake? Is this someone being cast at the last minute from the wedding supper? And even then, how does this relate to a lake of fire and third resurrection? Outer darkness doesn't seem like a lake of fire to me, but some have suggested it is the oblivion which comes afterward. Creative. But I suggest "outer darkness" is a blindness to the truth of God, as opposed to the light by which we see. And in any case, the timing just doesn't match a 3rd resurrection.

(Mat 25:14-30 NKJV) ""For *the kingdom of heaven* is like a man traveling to a far country, *who* called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. (15) "And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. (16) "Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. (17) "And likewise he who *had received* two gained two more also. (18) "But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. (19) "After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. (20) "So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' (21) "His lord said to him, 'Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' (22) "He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' (23) "His lord said to him, 'Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' (24) "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. (25) 'And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, *there* you have *what is yours*.' (26) "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. (27) 'Therefore you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. (28) 'Therefore take the talent from him, and give *it* to him who has ten talents. (29) 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. (30) 'And **cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**""

Again, the timing. This is when the master returns, not a thousand years later. I suggest the outer darkness is blindness, and not being in the Kingdom of God. And it is accompanied by weeping and gnashing of teeth, which is sadness and anger over not being there when they expected to be. This is even clearer in the story (not parable) in Mat 8.

(Mat 8:5-13 NKJV) "Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, (6) saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented." (7) And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." (8) The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. (9) "For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this *one*, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does *it*." (10) When Jesus heard *it*, He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! (11) "And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. (12) "But the sons of the kingdom will be **cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**" (13) Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that same hour."

In another parable, the man is cut asunder and joins the hypocrites:

(Mat 24:45-51 NKJV) ""Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? (46) "Blessed *is* that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. (47) "Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. (48) "But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' (49) "and begins to beat *his* fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, (50) "the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for *him* and at an hour that he is not aware of, (51) "and will cut him in two and **appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**"

And in the last, they are thrust out (Lk13), referring specifically to “yourselves”, meaning the Pharisees and Jews:

(Luke 13:23-30 NKJV) "Then one said to Him, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" And He said to them, (24) "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. (25) "When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,' (26) "then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.' (27) "But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.' (28) "**There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out.** (29) "They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. (30) "**And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last.**"

But neither of these instances speaks of a Lake of Fire, but rather agony or anger at not being in the Kingdom.

One of the claims made in the article is that for those in the 3rd resurrection, it is too late to repent. Is this true? Is it ever too late to repent? Doesn't a statement like that actually mean that any attempt to repent will meet with failure, because any attempt to do so will fall on deaf ears? What did Jesus expect of us? (Mat 18:21-22 NKJV) "Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" (22) Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." (Luke 17:3-4 NKJV) ""Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. (4) "And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."" So I ask you, is there ever a time when God would refuse to forgive someone who repented? Isn't this what we call the “unpardonable sin”? But what makes a sin “unpardonable”? Is it because God refuses to pardon such a heinous sin, whatever that is?

(Mat 12:31-32 NKJV) ""Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy *against* the Spirit will not be forgiven men. (32) "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come."

Why not? Is it okay to speak against our Lord and Savior, but not against His spirit? God will forgive someone who curses His Son, but if he curses the spirit He won't forgive him? Even if the spirit was a person, would this make sense? This has nothing to do with whether God feels more or less offended by how someone chooses to direct their cursing. It is not that God refuses to forgive a certain type of blasphemy. It is that someone who has reached the point where God has been working with him through His spirit and knowingly turns away and denies that power of God--that sin will not be forgiven, because that individual will never ask for forgiveness. I would like to suggest that those who are cast into the lake of fire are never sorry. They know that the God of mercy would forgive them, but they just don't care.

(Heb 6:4-6 NKJV) "For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, (5) and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, (6) if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame."

What does it mean to crucify the Lord again? How does that differ from sinning and needing forgiveness again? This person has fallen away. It is impossible to renew him because he doesn't want that. It isn't because God won't permit it. And if they, or we, repent, don't we in effect crucify the Lord all over again? Does that put Jesus to an open shame? I suggest it isn't Jesus who is put to an open shame. It is the one who fell away, and who won't repent, partly because of the fact that it would be a shame for him to do so. In any case, it is not God who won't permit this, it is the sinner who won't.

But the real meaning is given in (Heb 10:26-29 NKJV) "For if we sin **willfully** after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, (27) but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. (28) Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. (29) Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has **trampled** the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and **insulted** the Spirit of grace?" These sinners are guilty of wanting to crucify the Son of God all over again, and trampling Him underfoot, to be rid of Him in their lives, counting the blood of His sacrifice as nothing, and blaspheming the Spirit.

I would like to also suggest that any time God resurrects someone, there is always the chance that he could repent. The truly wicked are certainly not likely to do so. But because that chance exists, what is the difference between the 2nd and 3rd resurrections? What is the difference between someone who is brought up in the 2nd resurrection and refuses to repent, and those brought up in a 3rd resurrection who refuse to repent? Don't they both end up in the Lake of Fire? Or, what is the difference between someone brought up in the 2nd resurrection who does repent, and one brought up in a 3rd resurrection who sees the finality of the lake of fire and repents? I suggest that the 3rd resurrection requires, not a just God who wants to set an example for His righteous sons and daughters and to teach a futile lesson to the wicked, but it requires a vengeful God who will not accept any attempts to change His mind.

So what difference does any of this make, aside from being an intellectual exercise in logic? This is a future event, is it not? Won't things happen the way God decrees? And if He chooses to raise some up solely for the purpose of destroying them again, isn't that His business? I contend that it makes a big difference. A difference in the mindset of the Church of God. If the 3rd resurrection is for those who have received God's spirit, but have turned away from God and no longer want to be part of His Kingdom, then we are safe. We will never "accidentally" come to this. If we commit the unpardonable sin, we will know it. We may even be defiantly proud of it.

But our traditional understanding is that for those who are called now, this is our day of judgment. The second resurrection is for those who have never had a chance. Therefore, if we have God's spirit, if we understand His truth, and we do not commit that unpardonable sin, we are **guaranteed** to be in the first resurrection. Overcoming and developing the mind and character of God is not the important thing. What is important is not committing the unpardonable sin. Avoid the 3rd resurrection, and we have it made.

So I am suggesting the doctrine of the 3rd resurrection is not biblical, it is not logical, and it is even dangerous for the complacency it can bring. Judgment is on the house of God now, but it is judgment to determine whether we will be in the 1st resurrection. The rest of the dead will come up in the second resurrection. And for many, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when they see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom, and themselves thrust out. Then those who finally do overcome and repent, can join those with eternal life in God's Kingdom. For those who do not, the Lake of Fire awaits.