

“Awkward Precedents”

by Thomas Williams

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There is often more harm done in laying down awkward and false precedents in the attempt to sustain a favorite, vague theory than in advocating the theory itself. The controversy in support of the theory that Gentiles out of Christ will be raised to appear at the judgment would not have been seriously objectionable if it had not made so many misapplications of Scripture and resorted to far-fetched arguments, and thus laying down precedents which, if followed, would cause both sides of the controversy much chagrin in dealing with other subjects. For instance, much has been based upon what has been called “numerous cases” of resurrection in the past. Those “numerous cases” (?) have been used as precedents upon which to establish a rule, while they have not been relevant to the point in hand at all. The issue has been about resurrection *in and through Christ*, to whose work of redemption incidental cases of resurrection before His birth and before He became “the resurrection” stood in no way related. If it is right to say that there have been “numerous cases” of resurrection before Christ, therefore many will be raised by Him to judgment who are not in Him, by the same reasoning it might be said “numerous cases” of resurrection have taken place before and independently of Christ, therefore resurrection does not depend upon Christ and no line can be drawn anywhere, not even at the point of “intelligent rejection.”

The awkwardness of the precedent will be realized quite forcibly in dealing with believers in the resurrection of children. They will meet us in this way: You say that “numerous cases” of resurrection out of Christ have taken place in the past, therefore the same will take place in the day of resurrection. Granted, we derive much consolation from your argument, in that children have been raised to life in the past, therefore our children will be raised in the day of resurrection; for you will remember that the one whom Elijah restored to life was a child (I Kings 27:21); and in the case of Elisha with the son of the Shunamite it was a child she “took up” in her arms. The precedent here would prove infant resurrection if it proves any rule for the future at all.

In the New Testament we have the case of the ruler's daughter, of whom Jarius said: "My *little daughter* lieth at the point of death" (Mark 5:23).

(We know of areas within the Amended community where false arguments in relation to Resurrectional Responsibility have led some to falsely conclude that the children of Believers (not baptized) who have died premature deaths will in fact be raised at the Resurrection. Bro. Williams is not here condoning such a belief but showing how far some of these false arguments can go if taken to their logical conclusion. – A.T.)

Even if cases in the past were precedents for the future it would be difficult to find one where a Gentile was raised; and therefore the conclusion based upon assertion of "numerous cases" rests upon a mere assumption. The fact is that the repeated phrase "numerous cases" is an exaggeration begotten by a hard-pressed case. If reference is made to those who were raised at Christ's resurrection, let it be remembered that it was "the bodies of saints that rose," a fact that could be no precedent for resurrection of those who never pass under any law of resurrection, but die under the condemnation, "Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return."

A logician will never use an argument that proves too much, knowing well that it is suicidal. It is like running so fast that one tumbles heels over head and thus runs over himself as it were. The Apostle Paul in dealing with men who denied the resurrection altogether did not cite them to "numerous cases" of resurrection in the past; because he was proving the resurrection which is a set purpose of God by *a law* He has set in force. And to have attempted to establish this law of resurrection by random incidents in the past would have logically taken him beyond the limits he is so careful to guard in the entire chapter (I Cor 15). Had he used the past cases as premises the logical conclusion would have carried him beyond bound and given universal resurrectionists the advantage they seek. Therefore holding Adam as the cause of death by law in contrast with Christ as the cause of resurrection by law, the apostle guards the truth and force of his argument, and he begins, not before Christ with incidental random cases of resurrection, but *with Christ*, the point and pivot of the whole plan (Verses 3 to 11). Having started with *the* precedent he proceeds: "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some of you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" Those who were raised before Christ depended not upon His resurrection. Their resurrection was a fact whether He was ever raised or not. But the resurrection Paul is speaking of, being one that is governed by a law God has seen fit to empower to draw the line, is *the* resurrection of which Christ is first and therefore the *nucleus*.

Any position that will nullify an apostle's argument must be false. To illustrate, Paul in I. Cor. 15: argues: "If there is no resurrection of the dead then is Christ not risen; and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain and your faith is also vain (Verses 13,14). Now with the popular theory that the dead are happy in heaven used as a premise Paul's argument would be utterly without force. Such a theorist could say, No, Paul; it does not follow that our faith is vain if there is no resurrection of the dead, for we go to heaven independently of resurrection. If we had no other way of knowing that the popular theory is wrong except this nullifying effect upon an argument of an inspired apostle that would be enough.

Now the force of the apostle's argument in this chapter in behalf of *the doctrine of resurrection* (not incidental cases) is made to depend entirely upon the resurrection of Christ. But if the "numerous cases" of past resurrection, one could reply to Paul that resurrection does not depend upon Christ's resurrection; for numerous cases occurred before Christ and independently of Him, therefore numerous cases will occur again outside and independently of Christ. It is clear, therefore, that the "numerous cases" that are not at all numerous cannot be used nor abused in an attempt to sustain a law of resurrection for any out of Christ. If one should claim that God has raised to life some who never came within the scope of the law governing the resurrection generally, and what He has done He may do again, that would another thing, a mere harmless opinion that would not be worth while disputing about. Avoid awkward precedents.

Thomas Williams