

The Allurement of Hymenaen Preterism:

The Rise of 'Dispensable Eschatology'

A fellow pastor of a Reformed congregation informs me that a recent visitor to his congregation was encouraged to sign the guest book. When the service was over and the congregation disbanded, he peered at the guest book and noted the signature of the visitor, followed by a most unusual appendage: his name followed by the word “preterist.” The visitor could have saved the minister a lot of time from searching the dictionary for the meaning of the word had he signed his name “Hymenaeus” instead of “preterist.”

What is a “preterist?” And who was Hymenus? The word “preterist” is a grammatical term describing what is “past.” Thus, if our interpretation of the Book of Revelation is that most, if not all, the book is fulfilled, we would be “preterists.” Or, if our interpretation of the first 34 verses of Matthew 24 saw their fulfillment in the A. D. 70 coming of Christ, we would subscribe to the preterist interpretation. However, in recent years a new expression of preterism has emerged that assigns the Second Coming or Parousia of Christ, the general Resurrection, and the Great White Throne Judgment to the past. In other words, there are no future prophetic events. According to this scenario, time will continue on this terrestrial ball forever. Both sin and the earth are everlasting. At death the soul of the believer passes into the presence of God and the soul of the unbeliever (presumably) to judgment—both to be disembodied spirits forever. The advocates of these ideas call themselves “consistent preterists” over against the “inconsistent preterists,” who, it is claimed, fail to face the implications of their position. The so-called “consistent preterist” holds that the Second Coming of Christ occurred in A. D. 70, and that the resurrection occurred when Israel was spiritually quickened. Some “consistent preterists” will even claim to be Calvinistic in their soteriology. Consequently, Christians who truly love the doctrines of grace may be taken unawares. There will be the temptation to treat bygones as bygones, to minimize the colossal differences. This amalgamation-temptation threatens to compromise the historic creeds of the church, especially such vital Christian teachings as the resurrection.

The Centrality of the Resurrection

The cardinal doctrine of the New Testament is the resurrection. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 that if Christ be not raised up, our faith is vain, our preaching is vain, and we are of all men most miserable. Paul’s thrust is that a dead Christ cannot save and that the church cannot have communion with a Christ who is still in the throes of death. Christ was raised from the dead in order to justify us (Rom. 4:25). Most significantly, it was by Christ’s resurrection that He “was declared to be the Son of God with power. . .” (Rom. 1:4). The resurrection is not only a blazing advertisement for the verity of Christianity, but the supreme attestation to the Deity of Christ Himself. If there is no resurrection, there is no Christianity. Scripture even teaches that salvation itself is a resurrection (Jn. 5:24). The purpose of Christ’s resurrection was to justify the whole man—body and soul. Even the new birth is actually a metaphor for the resurrection instead of the resurrection a metaphor for the new birth. Our labor is based on the bodily resurrection of Christ too. We are animated to work because of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:58). Our work ethic is not only the (proverbial) “Protestant Work Ethic,” but

“the Resurrection Work Ethic.” This is why we abound in the work of the Lord. Our very redemption is portrayed as the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:23).

What about Hymenaeus?

The “consistent preterists” (as they charitably define themselves) deal with the resurrection in a manner that parallels two apostolic personalities. We refer to Hymenus and Philetus, whom Paul names in 2 Timothy 2:17. These men were apparently church members (they “named the name of Christ”—verse 17.). They were resurrection preterists and probably preterists in regard to the Second Coming of Christ, too. Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 2:18 about their belief that “the resurrection is already past.” How could they have been afforded some prestige in the church?

For starters, they no doubt arrived at this conclusion sometime after their profession of faith in Christ. Thus, they were members in good standing in the church. In addition, they may have been leaders in the church, perhaps even elders or pastors. What is more, they did affirm and confess the resurrection! The resurrection was an important article of their faith that perhaps they would even have died for. They would confess their whole-hearted agreement with the “Blessed Hope” of the Second Coming and the promise of the resurrection. Upon being questioned about their views, they would argue that their faith is the same faith as the church as a whole, except for their exotic belief that the resurrection is “already past.”

What did they mean when they taught that the “resurrection is already past”? First, their error was not that the resurrection of Christ was “past.” Recognition that the resurrection of Christ was an historical event is not heresy. Had Hymenus denied the past resurrection of Christ he would have been guilty of an obvious deviation from Biblical truth. One reason is every sermon in the Book of Acts exalts the resurrection of the flesh of Christ. The Apostle Peter provided a homiletic precedent for all future sermons by citing the second Psalm and its teaching about the resurrection of Christ’s “flesh” (Ac. 2:31). So this could not have been his error.

If Hymenus meant that the bodily resurrection of the believer is “already past,” he would have been speaking nonsense, for he himself would have been bodily resurrected. It is possible that he might have referred to the individuals who were resurrected on the very day that Jesus was crucified (Mt. 27:51-53:). However, since 1 Corinthians 15 and other resurrection-Scriptures were written long after that, the probability of this is zero.

The interpretation with the most distinct ring of truth is that he embraced the idea that the Christian’s spiritual resurrection is past or that Israel’s spiritual resurrection is past. Therefore he argued that there was no future, bodily resurrection for believers (or even unbelievers).

Reasons for Hymenaeus Preterism

Why did Hymenaeus and Philetus argue that the resurrection was past? The first reason is that they no doubt had a low view of the body—perhaps thinking of the body as a kind of shell for the more important spirit. This is the old error of Platonism that taught that the “body is the prison of the soul.” If the body is the prison of the soul, that does not forebode good things about the body; neither does it

envision any future resurrection of that “prison.” The very word “prison” is inflammatory; couched in modern terms, we could ask why anyone would want to resurrect Alcatraz so that he might once again occupy cell-block 25?! This is how they viewed the body: as cell-block 25. Scripture teaches that it is the grave that is the real prison—not the body. The pathetic Greek view of the body was influenced not only by Gnostic thinking which despised matter as evil, but also by a confounding of the good and the sinister usages of the word “flesh” in the New Testament (Gal. 5:19; Ac. 2:30-31). Its modern equivalent is those who despise the body, such as monastics, or those who mistreat their bodies by the neglect of the right foods or exercise or over-indulgence, such as gluttons and drunkards. An old expression of this contempt for the body is the doctrine that our souls preexisted before our bodies. The idea here is that the body was made only to house the all-important soul. A recent expression of contempt for the body was the thirty-nine self-murderers in Rancho Sante Fe who wanted to be liberated from their bodies to reach the “next level.” They justified the exit of their spirits by demeaning their bodies as mere “containers.”

“Consistency”

The second attraction of Hymennism is that it is ostensibly consistent (given the erroneous premise that the Second Coming of Christ has already occurred). Scripture does teach that the Second Coming and the resurrection of the body are simultaneous events (1 Cor. 15:23). In this passage Paul writes, “But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming.” If the only coming of Christ is His A.D. 70 spiritual coming, then the resurrection must have occurred then too. Hymenaens are therefore compelled to merge Christ’s Second Coming at the end of human history with his A.D. 70 coming. Virtually all of the “comings” of Christ in the New Testament are seen through Hymenaen glasses.

The new Hymenn view parallels the Hymennism of Paul’s day except that we know more about its details. The new Hymenaens do teach the Second Coming of Christ and the general Judgment during the last days. There is the “up-front” declaration that these doctrines are true— but again with the caveat that they are “already past.” Some Hymenaens even assert that all the eschatology of the Bible is fulfilled and “all is perfect” in the New Testament era—a statement that exudes a tinge of Christian Science and naivete.

Overreaction to Dispensationalism

The third attraction of Hymennism stems from an overreaction to dispensationalism, together with its esoteric charts and graphs, which include one false prediction after another. The church has been listening to the voices of Darby, Scofield, Hal Lindsey, Dave Hunt, Ryrie, Jack Van Impe, and Chafer, etc., for over 150 years. Whereas the hallmark of dispensationalism is elaborate charts and comic-book scenarios of the future, the Hymenaens have no charts at all. For them there is nothing to think about; all prophecy is fulfilled—no charts at all. Life is easy. Eschatology is the easiest of all. They peer into the future and see nothing. They speak of all prophecy as “fulfilled eschatology.” One Hymenn writer even tells us that the “hope of the resurrection” is an “empty” hope and an empty expectation, and that with regard to the future the Christian turns over the next leaf “and there is nothing.” Amazingly, the followers of Hymenus have chosen to combat dispensational eschatology with an eschatology that dispenses with eschatology!

Matthew 24

Jesus' Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 highlights a Hymenaen interpretation versus a true, preterist interpretation. Our Lord completes the first part of His sermon with the famous "Time-Text,"—"Verily, verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away until all these things be fulfilled." The orthodox preterist interpretation is that everything that occurred before verse 34 saw its fulfillment in that generation, the contemporary generation of Jews. However, the Hymenns merge everything that occurs after verse 34 into the A.D. 70 spiritual coming of Christ. For example, Hymenns argue that even verse 36 is about A.D. 70, when Jesus states, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." The problems with this viewpoint are explained adequately by Marcellus Kik in his *Eschatology of Victory*, and the reader is urged to review his arguments. Echoing Kik, we affirm that the designated "that day" does not refer to the days of tribulation for Israel prior to the coming of the Romans. The reason is that "that day" had already been introduced by our Lord earlier, even as far back as the Sermon on the Mount. For example, the Lord tells us that not every one who says unto Him, "Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven," and that "many shall say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Mt. 7:21-23). Earlier in Matthew, the Lord compared Israel's judgment with some of the historic cities that were notable for wickedness. Christ preached, "But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you." And again, "But it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee" (verse 22, 24). Christ had already drilled the "that day of judgment" terminology into the heads of the disciples, which they would have understood as including Sodom and Tyre and Sidon on a day other than A.D. 70. Certainly Tyre and Sidon and Sodom were not judged in A.D. 70. In the Matthean account of the Olivet Discourse, "that day" is an explicit reference to the great day when God will judge all past, present, and future generations. Paul also in his sermon to the Greeks on Mars' Hill preached "a day" that God will judge all men (Athenians included—not just Jews) by that Man Whom He has appointed (Ac. 17:31).

The best commentary on the "that day" terminology of verse 36 is both what follows verse 36 and what flows from verse 36. There are several parables that follow verse 36, the Faithful Servant and Evil Servant (24:45-51), the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13), and the Talents (25:14-30). This string of Second Coming parables is capped off with the picture of the Son of Man judging the nations "when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory" (25:31). When he comes "all nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats" (25:2). Christ's coming to judge all nations does not merely follow Matthew 24:36 in chronological sequence—it flows from it.

Interestingly, both dispensationalists and Hymenns have adopted an all-or-nothing approach: the former interpret virtually every coming of Christ prophesied in the New Testament as the Second Coming; the latter interpret every prophesied coming as Christ's A.D. 70 spiritual coming. There are then dispensational eschatologists and dispensable eschatologists.

The “dispensable eschatology” of the Hymenns also dispenses with the resurrection of the believer’s body at Christ’s Second Coming. Beginning with the premise that there is only one coming of Christ (A.D. 70) they force all other parousia texts into an A.D. 70 straitjacket. This forces them to deny the resurrection of the flesh and to wrest the meaning of 1 Corinthians 15. Scripture teaches that what makes the Second Coming of Christ the “blessed hope” is not a bare, physical coming of our Lord. The “blessed hope” is not only tied to the “hope of the resurrection,” but is colored and defined by the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:19; Ac. 23:6; 26:6; 2:26; 1 Thes. 4:13ff). It is only because of the resurrection of the body that we will be able to see the Lord and be caught up with the Lord in the air. This was the faith of Martha who said, “I know that he [Lazarus] shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (Jn. 11:24), and the repeated teaching of Christ who taught, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn. 6:40, 44, 54). The Hymenns repeatedly fail to distinguish between the “last days” of Israel and “the last day” at the end of this world. This in turn causes them to trivialize the resurrection of Christ and to discount the believer’s bodily resurrection altogether.

Misunderstanding Paul

A fourth attraction of Hymennism is based upon a misinterpretation of Paul’s statement in 1 Thessalonians 4:15, where he writes, “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep.” Devotees of Hymenus argue that Paul believed that he and others would escape death to witness the Second Coming. It is then urged that the Parousia had to occur during Paul’s lifetime. There are innumerable problems with this interpretation. First, not only would Paul have to be alive, but everyone in the church at Thessalonica to whom he was writing, too (he did say “we” which are alive). If we dogmatically assert that Paul experienced the Parousia, then we must dogmatically assert the same for all his readers. If so much as one of his readers was cut off by death before the Parousia, then we could not rule out the possibility that Paul himself (as well as all the Thessalonians) might have died before the advent of the Lord. Clearly, Paul is not telling the Thessalonians that each of them would escape death to experience the A.D. 70 coming. 1 Thessalonians may in fact have been the first letter that Paul ever wrote—perhaps twenty years before the destruction of Jerusalem. The reason he speaks of himself and them (the Thessalonians) as “living” is because he must distinguish between the living and the dead. His goal is to impart comfort to the living, not because he knew that the living would be alive when Christ returned, but because the living needed to know that their dead would be the “first” beneficiaries of the Second Advent (1 Thes. 4:16). His purpose is to impart comfort to the living about their dead (this is why he numbers himself with the living), not to prophesy that his generation would escape death altogether.

Another problem with the Hymenus interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4:15 is that this very epistle was read by other Christians too. It was to be read by “all the holy brethren” (1 Thes. 5:26-27). Keep in mind that the influence and therefore the fellowship of the Thessalonian Christians was great: this church was an example to “to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe” (1 Thes. 1:7). From this church the word of the Lord (which included “the word of the Lord” spoken to Paul about the Parousia and the resurrection— 1 Thes. 4:15) “sounded forth” “in every place” (1:18). According to Hymenaen logic,

every pre-A.D. 70 Christian who read 1 Thessalonians 4:15 would beat the grim reaper to be alive at Christ's A.D. 70 coming.

The disciples of Hymenus argue that all of Matthew 24 is about A.D. 70. Christ's coming to judge Israel is the Second Advent, they claim. Yet, Jesus says in Matthew 24:36, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." If, as the Hymenaeans assert, the "that day" of verse 36 applies to the A.D. 70 coming (which not even Christ in His human nature was privy to), how could Paul and all the Thessalonians know that they would escape death to experience it?

The Hymenaeans also have an insurmountable difficulty meshing 1 Thessalonians 4:17 with 1 Corinthians 15:52, which reads, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." Notice: whereas in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 Paul speaks of himself as possibly alive when Christ returns, in 1 Corinthians 15:52 he speaks of himself as bodily "resurrected" when Christ returns. Paul's intent is not to declare that he would be dead when Christ returned, any more than he would be living at his return. He is merely identifying himself with the people of God. Paul no doubt had a certain knowledge either that he would be alive or that he would be a participant in the resurrection after his death, but that certain knowledge is not the same as saying that he knew for sure which one of these alternatives would be his lot.

Also, nowhere does the Bible state that the bodily resurrection of all believers "is near," is "at hand," is "close." However, there is a statement describing the heretics who assert that the resurrection is "already past"—the Hymenaeans!

Satanic Pride

The fifth reason for this theology is Satanic pride, a desire to pass muster before men. Heretics love novelties. The pride in this case is not just opposing the resurrection theology of the Bible, but the craving to make a name for oneself—the desire to have the preeminence, that is, the spirit of Diotrephes (3 Jn. 9). The pride factor is particularly easy to spot in the Hymenaeans, for they are obsessed with a resurrectionless preterism. It extends further than identifying oneself as a "preterist" on the guest registrar of the church. The Hymenaeans are campaigning to "subvert" the Faith of others. Believing that they have discovered some new truth that has been hidden from the church for the last 2000 years, we can well understand their zeal. In Paul's last words to the elders at Ephesus, he wept, stating that after his departure, grievous wolves would enter in, and from even their own selves "shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Ac. 20:30). Since Paul was writing to Timothy who was probably in Ephesus, we can identify Hymenus and Philetus as two of these invaders.

What Is a Resurrection?

Because of the simultaneity of Christ's coming and the believer's resurrection, the Hymenaeans are forced to redefine the word "resurrection." For example, R.C. Leonard and J.E. Leonard in their book, *The Promise of His Coming*, define "resurrection" as following:

The New Testament term for resurrection, anastasis, is not a theological word but is related to the verb *stenai* Paul employs in the above passage [Eph. 6:11-13]. In ancient Greek literature, *stenai* is sometimes used in the sense of rising up in protest or rebellion. Resurrection or anastasis is literally “standing again” in defiance of enemy powers, and thus contains an element of vindication. (181)

The Leonards then quote Acts 2:23-24, where Peter argues that after Jesus was crucified, that “God raised Him up again. . . .” Thus, for the Leonards “resurrection” means vindication. What they call only “a feature” about Christ’s resurrection becomes the leading motif so that his bodily resurrection is diminished. For the Leonards, the real victory of Christ was not his overcoming physical death, but his standing up for his cause. Their notion that anastasis (“resurrection”) is not a theological word is both unwarrantable and astounding! The weakness of their whole argument is shown by the appeal to the Greek outside the Bible and even that is indirect—the best they can do is relate anastasis to the Greek verb *stenai*, which even by their own admission is used infrequently outside the Bible. Therefore, what is universally defined in the New Testament as a resurrection of the flesh, plays second fiddle to Christ as a mere champion and rebel. Of course, every interpreter of the New Testament ought to know that it is the context of the New Testament itself that colors and defines a word. What kind of credibility can a person have who would argue that the Greek word for resurrection is “not a theological word”?! The Leonards both dodge and discount the word anastasis as it is used throughout the Bible.

Hymenaeus compound their error about the resurrection further when they argue that all of 1 Corinthians 15 is a description of the spiritual resurrection of Israel during the last days of Israel’s existence. The Leonards tell us:

All of this shows that, for the New Testament writers, the resurrection is an ongoing process. It corresponds to the fulfillment in Christ of God’s promises to Israel during the last days of the old covenant period. Resurrection is accomplished “by the Spirit” and is a progressive overcoming of sin-death (Ibid, 171).

Not only is Israel not mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15; there is no Scripture proof that resurrection is “a progressive overcoming of sin-death.” Resurrection is connected to crucifixion and is as once-for-all as the death of Christ on the cross. That the Leonards see 1 Corinthians 15 as having its fulfillment in the A.D. 70 experience of Israel makes them the contemporary disciples of Hymenaeus.

Does all this mean that the Leonards rule out a future, bodily resurrection? They claim that while the Scriptures do not teach a future bodily resurrection, nevertheless, “fulfilled eschatology does not take issue with a bodily resurrection” (Ibid 177). This cavalier concession should not impress us, for it goes no further than the old Sadducean error. Alfred Edersheim recounts:

...the Talmud expressly states that the real principle of the Sadducees was not, that there was no resurrection, but only that it could not be proved from the Torah, or Law. From this there was, of course, but a short step to the entire denial of the doctrine; and no doubt it is taken by the vast majority of the party” (Sketches of Jewish Social Life, 241).

Also, we should note that the comment about not taking issue with a bodily resurrection is more a concession than a confession. Paul did not concede the resurrection; Paul proclaimed both the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the believer (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

1 Corinthians 15

The error of making the resurrection refer to the resurrection of man's spirit or to the resurrection of Israel is an attack on the resurrection of Christ himself, for if Christ's resurrection is a true paradigm of ours, then his and ours must be identical. The believer's bodily resurrection is tied to the resurrection of Christ, whose resurrection is the down payment of ours (1 Cor. 15:1-9). 1 Corinthians 15 teaches that Christ is the "firstfruits of all that slept" and that "every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits: afterward they that are Christ's at His coming" (vs. 20, 23). This is proven not only by the word "firstfruits" which means that the first sheaf is the same as the others in the resurrection harvest, but the fact that the first part of 1 Corinthians 15 defines Christ's resurrection in terms of his body. He rose again on the third day (v. 4), he arose according to the Scriptures (verse 4—which would include such Psalms as Psalm 16 where the "flesh" of Christ is stated), and he was "seen" (v. 5-8).

Not surprisingly, many Hymenns do in fact spiritualize Christ's resurrection. This is done in two ways: (1) It may be argued that Christ arose in spirit and that his post-resurrection appearances were in a temporary bodily form that he assumed after his spirit-resurrection. Therefore all of the physical appearances of our Lord after his spirit-resurrection were not, according to them, in the same body in which he was crucified. (2) The students of Hymenus will also argue that the body of Christ was a "spiritual body" (meaning a non-physical body). This conclusion is made on the basis of 1 Corinthians 15:44, where Paul writes that "it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body."

How shall we respond to the Hymenus "resurrection" theology? To begin with, not all Hymenns are as consistently heretical as they should be. Not all boldly dispute the physical resurrection of Christ. Some seem non-committal; others are slippery; others (the Leonards) see vindication for a cause as the central motif; still others have imbibed the historic Anabaptist idea that God created a new body for Christ (his resurrection not being a resurrection so much as a new creation). Yet, whatever the nuance of their heinous error, they do in fact argue against it when they deny the bodily resurrection of the believer. Paul deduced that if our bodies are not raised up, then Christ is not raised up (1 Cor. 15:16). The reluctance of every Hymenn to come to grips with his error resembles the deniers of the virgin birth of Christ, who would argue against the virgin birth, and yet claim both the impeccability of Christ and the full Deity of Christ. It is not difficult to see that the belief that Jesus was begotten by an earthly father threatens the doctrine of His impeccability. Also, how can a man with a naturalistic origin be a supernatural Savior? Likewise, if we disclaim the future resurrection of the believer, we are in fact repudiating the historic resurrection of Christ, no matter how much we protest to the contrary.

Let us not imagine that the Hymenn movement is monolithic either. Hymenns who claim the title "consistent preterist" disagree with other Hymenns who claim the same. While all Hymenns agree that the resurrection is "already past," not all formally disclaim the resurrection of Christ in the flesh. They may discount the importance of Christ's resurrection, but not all discount its factuality. Other Hymenns argue for the discontinuation of the Lord's Supper since Christians are to partake of the Supper "till He

come” (1 Cor. 11:26). Thus Hymenns themselves do not have a uniform definition of a “consistent preterist.”

Second, the belief of many Hymenns that Jesus took upon himself only a temporary body after His spirit-resurrection fails to answer some significant questions. The Hymenns have no explanation as to what became of the body of Christ after his ascension: as far as they are concerned, it may have peeled off like a space-capsule. Also, this does not explain the empty tomb. If the resurrection of Christ was a spirit-resurrection, why was the tomb empty? The empty tomb speaks tons about the physical resurrection. The fact that there were still holes in the side of Christ and imprints of nails in his hands testifies that the body that was crucified was the same body that was resurrected (Jn. 20:25, 27). Christ describes himself as body when he challenged his disciples, “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he showed them his hands and his feet” (Lk. 24:39-40). Notice: Christ describes himself as “I” in the bodily sense, even denying that he is a “spirit.” There is no spirit-resurrection here.

Third, the “spiritual body” of the believer does not mean that the believer will possess a non-physical body. The contrast in 1 Corinthians 15 is not between a physical body and a non-physical body. Paul’s contrast is between a “natural body” and a “spiritual body.” What is a “natural body?” The answer is a body that is susceptible to death, pain, etc. A “flesh and blood” natural body is different from a “flesh and blood” spiritual body because the spiritual body is raised up by the same Spirit that raised Jesus and is incapable of dying (Rom. 8:11). Christ was not raised up a spirit, but a “spiritual body.” As Zacharias Ursinus wrote:

The apostle means by a spiritual body, not that which is changed into the Spirit, or which is in all its properties equal to the Spirit, but that which is ruled by the Spirit of God, which is immortal and free from all misery, adorned with heavenly splendor, glory, activity, strength, and holiness.

Augustine is also most helpful. He wrote:

We must not imagine that because the Apostle says that the body which we have in the resurrection will be spiritual, that it will be purely spiritual without any body. But he calls that a spiritual body, which is wholly subject to the Spirit, and which is free from corruption and death; For when he calls the body which we now have a natural body, we must not suppose that it is not a body, but a soul. Therefore as the body which we now have is called natural, because it is subject to the soul, and cannot be called spiritual, because it is not yet fully subject to the Spirit, as long as it may be corrupted, so it will then be called spiritual, when it will not be able with any corruption to resist the Spirit.

Perhaps sensing the consistency problem, some Hymenns are toying with the idea that there may not even have been an incarnation of Christ too. Others assert that the resurrection of Christ was spiritual. Despite certain discontinuities in the movement, all Hymenns diminish the body—believing that the body is extraneous to man’s being. This obviously raises questions about their overall view about Christ’s Person and work. To be a truly consistent, Hymenn preterist, one should deny the flesh of Christ from cradle-to-grave, resurrection to Second Coming.

So, it is important to understand that the Hymenn movement is a Christological error as well as a prophetic error. The fall of just one “incarnation-domino” will lead to the fall of a second domino, etc. No Second Coming in the flesh means no resurrection of the flesh and no resurrection of the flesh means there is no incarnation. Watch the dominoes fall! We have here a “dispensable Christology” as well as a “dispensable eschatology.”

Paul’s Assessment of Hymenaen Theology

How then should we treat those who embrace Hymennism and yet claim to wear the badge of Christianity? We must look to Paul’s charge to Timothy. Paul tells us that the Hymenns have “erred with respect to the truth” (2 Tim. 2:18). Erring with regard to the truth means that we have erred about the “truth of the Gospel.” His description of the Hymenns is not that they have erred with respect to one truth among many Gospel truths. On the contrary, their error is a capital error; the whole truth has been denied.

Their preterist resurrection theology has overthrown the faith of some. This is a powerful indictment. Not merely the faith by which we believe, but The Faith that we believe is defeated, destroyed.

The teachings of the Hymenns are labeled a “canker,” a gangrene, perhaps a cancer. The Greek word could be a medical word or a word describing oxidation. If the former, then, the church is compared to a living organism. A malignancy or a gangrene can only destroy this organism! Hymenn theology is a cancer in the living organism of the church.

Hymenns also make “shipwreck” of the Faith (1 Tim. 1:19). The shipwreck is a religious shipwreck. Hymennism is not a mere pinhole in the hull of the good ship salvation.

The upshot is that we should not be referring to the disciples of Hymenus as “beloved brethren,” as “good friends,” as “dear Christian brethren.” They are the enemies of Christ and the enemies of the church. The “sons of the resurrection” should not be taken unawares. Hymenns who are members in Christian churches should be disciplined for their error, even delivered over to Satan so that they would not blaspheme (1 Tim. 1:20).

If a church unwittingly carries Hymenn books (such as the Leonards’ *The Promise of His Coming*, or J. Stuart Russell’s *The Parousia*), these books should be torched or removed immediately. No church should pray God’s speed on the disciples of Hymenaeus. If a church has Hymenn members, let her admonish or rebuke these subverters at once. We dare not give them the Lord’s Supper. We must not let them get away with calling themselves “preterists” or “consistent preterists,” or believers in “fulfilled eschatology.” The word “preterist” is a good word. The disciples of Hymenus are not preterists; their “dispensable eschatology” makes them heretics. What is more, they are antichrists; for only the spirit of antichrist says that Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh (1 Jn. 4 ff). When we interview new members, we need to question them about Christ’s resurrection and ours. Hymenns are not our friends; they are the enemies of the cross. If we deny the future resurrection of the body then we deny the resurrection of Christ. And if we deny the resurrection of Christ’s flesh, then we deny his accomplishment on the cross. The design of Christ’s bodily resurrection was to implement His sacrifice

on the cross, when He suffered the wrath of God in his body and in his soul. He came to redeem us in body and in soul (Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 6:20).

Hymenaenism is damnable heresy.

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*Note: The unrelated doctrinal positions taken by the author of this work are not necessarily those of Redeemer
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