

## 1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-58

A little boy was watching his father bury a dead cat that had been hit by a car. He stood there in silence for a while and then he said, "It won't do any good, Dad. It won't grow."

If the Lord delays his coming, then we are going to die. It is the one constant in life. However, we must also add that death is not the end for the Christian. When he gets put into the ground, he is going to grow. One of these days, we are going to rise from the grave.

### THE QUESTION OF THE RESURRECTION BODY

But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?" (1 Corinthians 15:35).

In the first part of this chapter (15:1-34), Paul has demonstrated that, since Christ rose from the dead in a bodily resurrection, we will also have a bodily resurrection. Now he anticipates and objection. This objection is presented in the form of two questions.

#### 1. Question #1: How are the dead raised?

Skeptics will always deny that something can be done if they cannot understand how it is accomplished. This is one of the issues at stake. How is it possible for a body that has died and has been buried and has now rotten away into dust to now be brought back to life?

#### 2. Question #2: With what kind of body do they come?

The Corinthians looked at the human body with all of its weaknesses and aches and pains and they said, "You mean that we are going to have to spend eternity in one of those?"

Paul answers these questions in three parts. First, he shows how the resurrection body

is illustrated in nature. Then he shows how the resurrection body is necessary from the Old Testament Scriptures. Finally, he shows how the resurrection body will be experienced at the coming of Christ.

15:35;36; 15:45;15:50

Two questions • How raised? What body?

Three Answers: The Resurrection Body is...

Illustrated in nature

Necessary from the Old Testament

Experienced at the coming of Christ

#### THE RESURRECTION BODY ILLUSTRATED IN NATURE

36 You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; 37 and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. 38 But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own.

39 All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. 40 There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. 41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. (1 Corinthians 15:36-44).

The Greeks prided themselves in their observations of the natural world around them. They thought of their philosophy as a philosophy of nature, but they failed to learn the lessons of nature.

## 1. A Strong Rebuke: You fool! (15:35).

This is strong language, especially when we consider that these are the people who took such pride in their worldly wisdom. Paul says that their wisdom has brought them to the heights of foolishness.

The wisdom and the philosophy of the Greeks taught that the body is evil while the soul is good. The release of a soul from its body was a thing to be desired. For this reason, they looked with disdain on any teaching that said there would be a bodily resurrection.

Paul is going to illustrate the truth of the resurrection from three areas of nature.

15:36-38; 15:39; 15:40-41

Illustrated from agriculture

Illustrated from zoology

Illustrated from astronomy

## 2. Illustrations from Agriculture (15:36-38).

The first area that Paul uses to illustrate the nature of the resurrection body is taken from the realm of AGRICULTURE. There are four parts to this illustration.

The Law of Death before Life: That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies (15:36).

The seed will not grow until it is planted in the ground and dies. When the seed is placed into the ground, the outward form of the seed must decay for the plant to begin to grow. When the plant begins to grow, what happens to the seed? It is gone. So it is with the resurrection. The old body must pass away before the new body can come.

The Law of Growth: That which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else (15:37).

That which you place into the ground is not the same as that which grows from the ground. If you want to grow a watermelon, you do not plant a watermelon, you plant a watermelon seed. You plant the seed, but it is a vine that grows and produces a multiplicity of fruit.

The same is true of the resurrection. The body that dies and goes into the ground is not the same as the one that will come out of the ground. They are different.

The Law of the Creator: But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own (15:38).

God gives each seed a body as He wishes. It is God who produces the fruit according to the good pleasure of His will (Ephesians 1:11). He is the source of growth.

The same is true of the resurrection. It is something that will be accomplished by God. It is a body that He will give.

The Law of Identity: But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own (15:38).

Each of the seeds has a body of its own. This is the principle of identity. There is maintained a relationship between the seed and the plant that grows. When you plant apple seeds, you grow apple trees that produce apples. You don't get banana trees that produce oranges.

So it is with the resurrection. Though you will one day be changed, you will still be you. You will not cease to exist and another being be created in your place. You will merely be changed.

1. Illustrated in Zoology: All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish (15:39).

There are many different kinds of flesh.

- Men • Beasts • Birds • Fish

But they all have one thing in common. They are all made up of flesh. This commonality does not change merely because they are different kinds of flesh.

So also is the resurrection. As there is natural flesh, so also there is spiritual flesh. Just as different types of flesh do not cease to be flesh, so also different types of bodies do not cease to be bodies.

2. Illustrated in Astronomy: There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another.

41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory (15:40-41)

Paul moves from the worlds down here to the world up there. He points to the world of astronomy to illustrate his point. Just as there are different kinds of astronomical bodies, so there are different kinds of resurrection bodies.

So also is the resurrection of the dead...

It is sown a perishable body (15:42) It is raised an imperishable body (15:42)

It is sown in dishonor (15:43) It is raised in glory (15:43)

It is sown in weakness (15:43) It is raised in power (15:43)

It is sown a natural body (15:44) It is raised a spiritual body (15:44)

If there is a natural body (15:44) There is also a spiritual body (15:44)

You have a body right now. It may work okay for the moment, but it is slowly falling apart. After 70 or 80 years, it will finally quit working. It will decay. It will die. That is the bad news. The good news is that you are going to get a new body. It will be an eternal body. It will never fade or decay.

## THE RESURRECTION BODY SEEN IN THE SCRIPTURES

45 So also it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. 47 The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. 48 As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. 49 And just as we have borne the image of the

earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. (1 Corinthians 15:45-49). Paul makes an appeal to the Old Testament Scriptures to show the difference between the natural body that is sown and the spiritual body that will be raised. There is a lesson here. It is that Christianity is not a recent development. It is not a religion that someone dreamed up a few years ago or even a few thousand years ago. It is not a man made philosophy. It goes all the way back to Adam and even before. It originates with the Creator of the universe.

1. The Original Body: "The first man, Adam, became a living soul." (15:45).

This is a paraphrase of Genesis 2:7. It is evident from the Genesis account that Adam was initially created and designed for an existence on planet earth. He was created from the very material of the planet on which he was made to live.

You have experienced this same type of existence through natural birth. You are related to Adam. You are of the earth and when your body dies, it returns to the earth.

2. The Original Resurrection Body: The last Adam became a life-giving spirit (15:45).

This is the second type of existence. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, then you have experienced this type of existence through the new birth. You have been born into the family of God. You are now related to Jesus Christ. This relationship supersedes the old one with Adam. You now have a position in the heavenlies. You are "in Christ." It is your legal standing.

The same will one day be true of your body. Right now, it suffers through the relationship with Adam. Because Adam experienced pain and weariness, you also experience pain and weariness. Because Adam's body once died, your body will also die. But because Christ rose and now has a spiritual body, so you shall also have a spiritual body at the resurrection.

3. The Contrast between the Two: However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual (15:46).

Which came first, the natural body or the spiritual body? It is the natural body that came first. This sets up a contrast that describes our own future.

Jesus Christ Became a life-giving spirit at His resurrection

The first man from earth bore descendants who are of the earth

The second man from heaven bore descendants who are from above

Just as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

By coming to Christ in repentance and faith, we have abandoned the fate of the first man to share in the eternal destiny of the second man.

#### THE FINAL VICTORY OF THE RESURRECTION

50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.<sup>51</sup> Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, <sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. <sup>53</sup> For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.<sup>54</sup> But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. <sup>55</sup> O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" <sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; <sup>57</sup> but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 15:50-58).

Having shown that the truth of the resurrection is revealed both in nature and in the Scriptures, Paul now moves to a description of that final resurrection. In doing so, he is pointing out that we have a goal in life. It is found in death. It has been said that no one really grows up until he realizes that he will die.

I am told that in the cemetery of Christ's Church in Philadelphia is the grave of Benjamin Franklin. On the tombstone are engraved the following words:

**"The body of Franklin, printer, life the cover of an old book, its contents torn out and stripped of its lettering and gilding, lies here food for worms. But the work will not be lost, for it will appear once more in a new and more elegant edition, revised and corrected by the Author."**

Those words are an echo of those that were written by the Apostle Paul in this chapter. They are words of victory.

## 1. The Necessity of the Resurrection:

Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable (15:50).

For a man to inherit the kingdom of God, he must be changed. The initial change is spiritual. He must be born again. Jesus said that in His conversation with Nicodemus when He told him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3).

There must also be another change. This is a change from a temporal body to an eternal body. There is coming an hour when those who have died will rise from death to a new kind of body that will never again see death.

This brings up an interesting problem. What is to happen to those believers who have not yet died when Christ returns? The seed of their body has not yet been sown. Death has not taken place. How can they experience a resurrection if they have not yet died? The answer is seen in verse 51.

## 2. The Mystery of the Resurrection: Behold, I tell you a mystery (15:51)

When you hear the word "mystery," you might think of an Agatha Christie novel in which the butler is the prime suspect. The word "mystery" was commonly used in Greek literature to describe the secret cultic rites of the ancient mystery cults. An integral part of this concept was that those who took part in the mysteries must be initiated.

Paul is speaking to those who are initiated. He is speaking to believers. He is about to tell them a mystery. He is about to tell them of something that has been previously hidden from them, but which is about to be revealed.

## 3. The Blessing of the Resurrection Change: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed (15:51-52).

The problem with which Paul is dealing here is the exact opposite of the one that faced the Thessalonian believers.

Thessalonian Christians: In 1 Thessalonians 4, the question was whether those who



Corinthian Christians: Here the question is whether those who are still living receive the same benefits of those who already died

Will those who died receive what we get? Will we get what those who have died receive?

The answer to both questions is YES! We who are still alive at the time of Christ's return will be changed. How will this take place? Verse 52 goes on to describe how this will happen. There are three specific points in this description.

This change is INSTANTANEOUS: In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (15:52). This will not be a gradual process like the growing of a seed into a plant. It takes place in a single instant.

The change takes place at the LAST TRUMPET: at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised (15:52).

This phrase tells us WHEN this change will take place. It will take place at the time when the last trumpet is sounded. The sounding of God's great trumpet is a common theme throughout the Scriptures.

It will come about also in that day that a great trumpet will be blown; and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD in the holy mountain at Jerusalem. (Isaiah 27:13).

And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. 31 And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Matthew 24:30-31).

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

These passages are very clear. The sounding of the trumpet of God is going to accompany the gathering of God's people. It will take place at the time of the Second Coming of Christ.

This change will take place AFTER THE DEAD have been raised: The dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed (15:52).

The raising of the dead are mentioned first and then this is followed by the statement that we shall be changed. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 is even more specific to tell us that this is the order in which these events are to take place.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Why do the dead rise first? One old country preacher suggested it is because they have six feet further to go. In reality, the Bible does not tell us why this is the case.

#### 1. The Victory of the Resurrection:

But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory" (15:54).

The history of the world has been a history of open warfare. This war has been against death. It started in the Garden of Eden and it will finally conclude at the coming of the Lord in victory. Notice the study in contrasts:

Perishable, Mortal, Death puts on imperishable, puts on immortality, is swallowed up in victory

#### 2. The Celebration of the Resurrection:

O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"<sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; <sup>57</sup> but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (15:55-57).

Paul breaks into a song of victory. We don't know the tune, but we can see the chiasmatic format of the song.

O death, where is your victory. Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory

O death, where is your sting?

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. What does Paul mean

when he says that the power of sin is the law? There is something about the law that entices people to sin. When I was a lot younger, there was a television show called "Candid Camera." They would play practical jokes on people and catch it on film. One such joke involved a hole in a wooden fence and a sign under it that said, "Don't look through this hole." What happened? People who had walked by ignoring the hole now stopped, looked both ways and then looked through it.

There will come a day when sin will lose its power. It will be in that day when we shall see Christ and we shall be like Him. It shall be that day when our love for Him shall be consummated and when the law will no longer be needed.

### 3. The Motivation of the Resurrection:

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord (15:58).

In view of the future Paul has predicted, he now gives an admonition for the present. It is a twofold admonition.

First, we are to be steadfast and immovable. This is a reference to your stability. How do you become stable? By having a solid foundation. By being grounded in the Word. By holding fast to proper teaching.

There is also a second admonition. We are to be always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. This is a call to service. It is not enough to have a solid foundation. You must subsequently build upon it. It is not enough to be grounded in the Word of God. There must also be growth in your life. It is not enough to hold to Biblical teachings. Those teachings must accomplish their work in you and bring forth fruit.

The order in which these two admonitions are presented is crucial. First you need to know the Word. It is only then that you can begin to grow and to function and to serve Him.