

“Our Resurrection: Not How, But Who”

1 Corinthians 15:35-49

³⁵ *But someone may ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?”*

Paul has been trying to explain to Christians living in a Greek philosophical world view that didn't believe in a physical afterlife how that actually happens. While Paul will explain it as best as he can, the real answer is not how, but who – God does it.

Back in Acts 25-26 when Paul was first arrested and held under guard in Caesarea by Governor Festus, Herod Agrippa (grandson of Herod the Great) came to see Festus and Festus told him about Paul. Agrippa ruled over Judea and wanted to hear Paul's story. This is what Paul said to him in Acts 26:2

² *“King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, ³ and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.*

⁴ *“The Jewish people all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. ⁵ They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that I conformed to the strictest sect of our religion, living as a Pharisee. ⁶ And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today. ⁷ This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. King Agrippa, it is because of this hope that these Jews are accusing me. ⁸ Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?”*

Even though the Jew's own Scriptures said God's people will rise from the dead, many Jews did not believe it either. But as we saw last week, Jesus the God-man was the first to rise from the dead, receiving a new body and that assures any who choose to follow Him that we also will have new glorified bodies in His presence one day. But how will that happen? And I believe Paul senses the skepticism in the question when he answers quite bluntly in the Greek, “Fools!” in v.36. Most of you are farmers. How do you get your crops? So he gives a great illustration from agriculture.

What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. ³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.

Our Current Body Must Die Before Receiving our New Body (15:35-38)

Just as a seed is planted in the ground, which then decomposes and produces a unique plant, fruit, or vegetable, so must we first die before we can receive our new bodies. The makeup of the seed has built within it the unique ability to produce the fruit that comes up. They're different but related. One comes because of the other, yet unique according to how it was designed. So, if we want to understand how we get our resurrected bodies,

We first have to bury the old life (vv.35-37)

When we die our bodies decompose and are no more. Yet, God miraculously raises us up and will give us a new body, that looks very similar to the old one but completely new and as we'll see is

indestructible. Now, the analogy is for illustration purposes only. Our bodies completely decompose until all that's left are bones. So, let's make sure we understand that our physical flesh is the pattern for our future resurrected bodies. Paul uses an analogy to show us that our new bodies are different yet somehow relates. But the way we get them is we must die first.

The principle of dying to self so we can experience new spiritual life is what the gospel is all about. If you want to experience the new life in Christ, you must first die to the idea that you can save yourself. Jesus said if you want to experience God's joy in life you need to put our desires behind God's. Marriage is a great illustration too. If we want happy marriages we each have to die to our own desires by meeting the other's needs ahead of our own. When we put each other's needs first, we experience God's joy and our needs are also met. And sometimes, what we thought were our needs were only our selfish desires. This dying first to self is a universal spiritual principle to finding joy in God. So, if we want to be with God forever we must die first

For God to bring new life (v.38)

³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.

As we've seen in this letter, many of the Corinthian Christians were selfishly thinking their preference was the right way. "I can meat so I'm more spiritual than you." "I can speak in tongues because I'm more spiritual than you." "I don't need to wear a head covering because I'm more spiritual than you." "I prefer Apollos over Paul which means I have God's approval." All these illustrate the believer's unwillingness to die to self, and when we do so we fail to experience the new Holy Spirit led life of putting God and others ahead of ourselves. Paul's using resurrection as a way to continue to deal with these issues. Are you listening, he's saying.

How does resurrection work? Paul says it's like planting a seed that produces a unique crop. But if only God really knows how its done. God gives us a new body as He determines. And so this is the direction he pursues now.

³⁹ All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. ⁴⁰ There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor [glory] of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor [glory] of the earthly bodies is another. ⁴¹ The sun has one kind of splendor [glory], the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor [glory]. ⁴² So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 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.

Paul now uses creation as an illustration that the world and the universe has many distinct bodies and so

Our Current Bodies are Not Designed for Eternity **(15:39-44)**

He explains something quite obvious to show us that our new bodies will be different than our current bodies. So he talks about "kinds" just as it says in Genesis 1 to say that

Different kinds of bodies are made for different environments (vv.39-41)

Within our earthly environment, we have people, animals, birds and fish. They are unique to each to other even though they share the same environment. They don't evolve from or into each other. They weren't designed that way.

Look at the sky. The sun is unique from planets and so are stars. They share the same environment but they are uniquely different. Now he moves us toward thinking beyond our environment when he says all these have different glories. All the planets and stars have their own glory. Glory means manifested, made known. From earth they don't look much different. But telescopes show us spectacular glories of how each are uniquely created. By whom? God. It's only been the last couple of centuries that we've really started to see what the universe looks like through powerful telescopes [PowerPoint slides were shown of spectacular sights in our galaxies].

¹ *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*

² *Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.*

³ *There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.*

⁴ *Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.*

God has made everything to manifest His creative glory and knowledge through all that we see and can only see with telescopes and microscopes. Paul's point here is that God creates everything to display His glory in its environment, including our future resurrected bodies.

⁴² *So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 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.*

Our bodies started decaying the day we were born. It ends up weak, dishonoured and eventually decays. But the old body has to die before we get our new imperishable, glorious spiritual body. Our new spiritual body is made for our new spiritual environment. The new earth and the new Jerusalem will be somehow be both spiritual and physical, just like our new bodies. Essentially, Paul describes us as

New and improved (vv.42-44)

We like new and improved gadgets, clothing and other things. But every one of them wears down at some point. Why? Because of sin. When Adam and Eve sinned, sin affected the whole world not just people. Paul writes in Romans 8:18

¹⁸ *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*

²² *We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*

²³ *Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies*

This is what we're looking forward to, as is the creation itself. Everything will be new one day.

God's Plan for Us Will be Out of This World **(15:45-49)**

Notice Paul's emphasis here:

⁴⁵ So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

From Adam we received physical life but also a limited life. Yet from Jesus, by faith, we receive eternal life. Eternal is an adjective describing what we have now and will have for all eternity. It will be an eternal physical life on an eternal, physical earth that's made for the heavenly environment God has designed. We won't be made from earth's dust but from God. God doesn't need our decomposed physical bodies to design our new bodies. People have been concerned about cremation, wondering how can God put us back together if we're reduced to dust? Every death eventually reduces to dust. New bodies means new, not of this world. They are made somewhere else for somewhere else that will last forever.

So if this is a guarantee for the believer – and it is because the Holy Spirit is a downpayment for our inheritance (Eph. 1:13-14) – then shouldn't that change how we live now? Shouldn't we

Live now as if Jesus already gave us new life (vv.45-48)

If Jesus has already given us His life-giving Spirit that's from heaven now while we're still here, shouldn't we live like it's going to happen? If that's true then we shouldn't worry like the rest of the world about tariffs and yo-yo stock markets and even our children and grandchildren's future? At least not worry the same as the world does. We always have concerns but we have a great God that tells us don't worry about tomorrow, focus on today. Be anxious about nothing by praying about everything. By casting our cares on Him because He cares for us. What are you worried about right now? You got a whole laundry list of worries? Why? Don't you believe you are a new creation in Christ Jesus? Don't you believe that the same God who holds your future in His hand can also hold you and get you through the present? Sometimes we are practical atheists. We say we trust God but in practice we don't live like we should.

⁴⁹ And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

What man? The God man Christ Jesus who dwells in you and me.

Live now with God's future as your goal (v.49)

Col 1:²⁴ Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. ²⁵ I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— ²⁶ the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. ²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

Paul put up with current sufferings for the sake of making disciples for Jesus because Christ is our hope and we will one day be fully mature in Christ. Serving each other with the goal of being more mature in Christ is a guaranteed work. God is going to do that for us who are in Christ. The hope of glory dwells in us. When we invest in others spiritually, we are investing in a sure thing. This is one of the reasons why he ends the chapter with v.58 which is a great verse to memorize

⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Does that include sharing the gospel with as many people as we can even though many will reject Christ? Yes, because anyone who accepts Christ receives all this. Our message works. The gospel works. Jesus changes lives. He is the present hope of future glory. But we can't force people to accept it.

We are already new creations; we just haven't received our glorified bodies yet. How does that exactly work? Paul gives some illustrations from farming and creation which help us understand it somewhat, but the bottom-line is don't worry about it too much. God gives us a body which He determines. Live now as if you know you're going to get it one day. Earlier Paul reminded us that our current body is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. While we wait for our new bodies, let's honour God with our current bodies.

Eph. 4:22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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