

A New Body

Lesson Text: 1 Corinthians 15:42-57. **Devotional Reading:** 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.

Background Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15.

TIME: A.D. 55 **PLACE:** from Ephesus

1 Corinthians 15:42-57

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. ⁴⁵ So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"^[a]; 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 is of heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we^[b] bear the image of the heavenly man.

⁵⁰ I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵ "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

TODAY'S AIM

- Describe the resurrection bodies in which believers will rise when Jesus returns to earth.
- Explain why Jesus' resurrection gives us hope that we will receive a new eternal body.
- Compose words of hope and encouragement to someone grieving the death of a Christian friend or family member.

INTRODUCTION

For some, the topic of the resurrection is considered only during the Easter season. To be sure, the resurrection of Christ is at the very heart of the Christian faith.

Without it, Christianity would be untrue and unworthy of our devotion-or even our attention!

First Corinthians 15 offers us the most complete treatment of resurrection in the entire New Testament. Paul began the chapter by establishing the fact of the resurrection of Christ (vs. 1-4). The truth of His bodily resurrection was established on the basis of eyewitness testimony (vs. 5-7). The Lord appeared not only to His chosen apostles but to some five hundred brethren as well. Perhaps most important to Paul, however, was the fact that Jesus actually appeared to him, calling him to preach the very gospel he had attempted to destroy (vs. 8-11).

Although the Corinthians had accepted the fact of Christ's resurrection, some apparently were doubting that there would be a resurrection for the believer (1 Cor. 15:12). As Paul pointed out, denying the future resurrection of Christians would have disastrous consequences for the Christian faith, leaving us in an unsaved condition (vs. 13-19).

The assurance of our future resurrection rests on the resurrection of Christ Himself. He was the firstfruits, meaning that His victory over death anticipates our own triumph over the grave.

LESSON BACKGROUND

There's nothing worse than a Christian believing that he or she will not rise from the dead at all-ever. That is the belief of millions of non-Christians today, and perhaps it is the belief of some members of your church. It was the belief of some in the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 15:12). This false belief was also held by some Jewish leaders of the day (Luke 20:27).

As proof that the dead do rise, Paul pointed to the resurrection of Christ. There can be no doubt that He really had been dead. The spear thrust into His side would have killed Him if He had not been dead already (John 19:31-34). And Jesus really returned to life. That is proved in at least three ways: (1) an abundance of reliable witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:3-8), (2) the failure of Jewish authorities to produce a corpse to refute the claims of a resurrection, and (3) the willingness of the disciples to die martyrs' deaths for their belief in a risen Lord. It is Jesus' resurrection that sets the stage for our own.

The Resurrection Body (1 Corinthians 15:42-50)

At this point in his discussion of the resurrection, Paul anticipated a question that is still asked: *"How are the dead raised? What kind of body will they have when they come?"* (v. 35). To be sure, we cannot be dogmatic about a concept that is not discussed in great detail in the New Testament.

Since God is the Creator of all life, Paul used the natural order to illustrate the spiritual order. Just as birds, fish, and mammals all have bodies that are suited uniquely for their purpose in this world (vs. 39-41), so it will be with the resurrection body.

The kernel of wheat that is planted in the ground produces something far greater than that single seed. *"So it is with the resurrection of the dead"* (v. 42). Like seeds, our bodies are planted in the ground at death; and like seeds, they will produce new bodies that are related to but different from our present bodies. Of course, in sowing seeds one looks forward to life, not death (John 12:24).

As we all know, we now reside in bodies that are corruptible. Subject to disease and accident, human bodies can be destroyed very quickly. Our new resurrection bodies, however, will be incorruptible, incapable of disease or decay and unable to be destroyed.

1. What contrasts did Paul make between our current bodies and the new body (1 Corinthians 15:42)?

Even when a person dies doing something honorable, death itself is not honorable. A funeral service may honor the dead, and we may even treat with tenderness the body that is left behind; but the body must be disposed of rather quickly, for it is corruptible.

Death reminds us that we are sinners and that a penalty is being enacted upon our physical bodies because of Adam's sin (Rom. 5:12). Nevertheless, because of Christ's resurrection, our bodies will be raised in glory.

Death is a sign of weakness. Death comes when our bodies are unable to ward off disease or have been mortally wounded in battle or because the laws of physics have come into play in an accident. Whatever the situation, death results because our bodies are weak.

The resurrection body, however, is an exhibition of power, not weakness. Just as Christ's beaten, bruised, and crucified body led to death, so His resurrection proved His power over death. Our future resurrection will be a validation of the same truth, namely, that the power of God's Spirit is greater than the power of the grave (cf. John 5:21; Rom. 8:11).

2. Explain the resurrection of the body "in power" (v. 43)?

While we know what the future holds, that future has a far-off feel. The immediate future looks like one of loneliness, as we have to go on without the company of our loved one. It is not a grief of hopelessness, but one of separation. The loss of our loved one means we have lost one who shared our dreams, our interests, and our responsibilities. Our lives will be different, so we are anxious about the change.

Of course, we talk of the future hope when we visit at the funeral home. We talk of Heaven, of rest from labor, and of respite from suffering. But we also admit the loss, and we agree that the person has a right to feel sorrow. We celebrate the earthly life, we mourn the loss, and we anticipate the resurrection. Sorrow and joy mix, and both are genuine and appropriate.

3. *Knowing the body will be raised in incorruption, power, and glory, why are we so distraught when we bury a loved one? What encouraging words do you say to the family of a departed believer?*

We currently live in a "natural body" (1 Cor. 15:44). This body was formed from the "dust of the ground" (Gen. 2:7) and eventually returns to the earth. As Solomon said, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (Eccles. 12:7).

The resurrection body, though, will be a "spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:44). This body is to be distinguished from the spirit (or soul), which departs the body at death (Luke 23:46; John 19:30) and then returns to the new body at the time of the resurrection (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-16; 5:23).

"The resurrection body has been the subject of much discussion. Scripture teaches that it is a body analogous in some respects to the earthly body, but with this major difference: the corruption and mortality attached to the mortal body as a consequence of sin will be removed. It will become an immortal, incorruptible, perfected body without any of the limitations imposed by the fall, and as far superior to the mortal body as the grown wheat plant is superior to the seed from which it has sprung" (Lindsell, ed., Harper Study Bible, Zondervan).

4. *How can the resurrection body be a "spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:44)?*

When Paul spoke of what was "written," he was referring to Genesis 2:7: "Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being (soul in KJV)".

When we use the word "soul," we often mean the unseen inner person. Sometimes the Scriptures use "soul" in this manner (Matt. 10:28; 16:26; Rev. 6:9); however, a "soul" is frequently understood as a being or a person (Acts 2:41; 7:14; 27:37). The word for "soul" (1 Cor. 15:45) is related to the word translated "natural" in verse 44 and is used here in the sense of physical life.

The "last Adam" (v. 45) is a reference to Christ, as verse 47 confirms. He is a "life-giving spirit" (v. 45), that is, a quickening Spirit. Just as Adam could pass on physical life to his descendants, so Christ passed on spiritual life to His followers.

In God's divine plan, human beings first receive physical life; only after that can they receive spiritual life. It has been said that if we are born only once, we will die twice. If, however, we are born twice, we will have to die only once! Those born anew through the Spirit's power (John 3:1-7) will not have to face the "second death" (Rev. 20:14). Paul was simply expanding on what he had said earlier: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22).

5. *Who is the "last Adam" (vs. 45-47)?*

Adam was "earthly" because he had been made from the earth. We, of course, are like him in that regard. Our connection with Adam goes beyond the physical, though. Like the first man, we have sinned (Rom. 3:23), "for as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (5:19).

The good news is that "we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." "The resurrection body completes the work of redemption and gives to us the image of God: "holy" 1 Peter 1:15 (set apart from the world, chosen to serve him and be blessed by him), but in the image of Adam as far as the body is concerned. One day we shall bear the image of the Savior when we share in His glory" (Wiersbe, Bible Exposition Commentary, Victor).

6. *What will be the difference between our earthly and heavenly images (vs. 48,49)?*

"Flesh and blood" (1 Cor. 15:50) is another way of saying "mankind." "It refers simply to the body in its present form, composed of flesh and blood, to be sure, but subject to weakness, decay, and death, and as such ill-suited for the life of the future" (Fee, 1 Corinthians, Eerdmans).

In our present human state, we cannot "inherit the kingdom of God." Our current physical bodies are incapable of existing in the presence of God. It is clear that here Paul was referring to the kingdom that will come after the resurrection of the righteous (John 5:28-29; 1 Thess. 4:16; Rev. 20:5). As the Lord said to Moses, "But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." (Exod. 33:20).

Only partly do we understand these natural bodies in which we are spending our lives on earth. Even with all our modern technology and diagnostic tools there is still much to learn!

Sometimes our bodies surprise us with their vigor and endurance; sometimes they frighten us with their weakness or illness. But the spiritual bodies that will be ours will be amazing; only dimly can we imagine them now. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be" (1 John 3:2).

7. What does "flesh and blood" mean (v. 50)?

The Resurrection Hope (1 Corinthians 15:51-57)

When Paul used the term "*mystery*," he meant something that was unknowable apart from divine revelation. From observation human beings would never come to the conclusion that what was dead could one day be made alive again.

Though some will die, or "*sleep*" (v. 51), others will be alive at the time of the Lord's return. As Paul told the Thessalonian church, "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17). This event is often called the rapture. The Lord will seize His people from this planet before He brings His judgment upon the world.

Paul stressed in 1 Corinthians 15:51 that "*we will all be changed.*" New bodies await all of God's people, whether they are among the living or the dead at the time of Christ's return.

This change from a mortal to an immortal body will not be like the changes we now experience in our human bodies. Those changes often come over time as we develop from childhood to adulthood or when our health is in a state of decline because of the aging process. The change Paul described will come "*in a moment, in the blink of an eye*" (v. 52).

This change will occur when "*the trumpet will sound.*" The trumpet signals the King's coming, and its mention here makes it clear that this passage and I Thessalonians 4:16-18 are describing the same event. "*The dead in Christ shall rise first*" (1 Thess. 4:16) and join the Lord in the air in new resurrection bodies. Living believers will then be "changed" instantaneously being given resurrection bodies too (1 Cor. 15:52), and "*be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air*" (1 Thess. 4:17).

8. What kind of changes will we experience "at the last trump" (when Jesus returns) vs. 51,52?

Ever since the Lord departed, Christians have lived with a sense of the imminent return of Christ. But whether the Lord returns before we die or we die before He returns, our ultimate future will be the same. Thus, we live our lives in view of the reality of His return and the consummation of His Heavenly kingdom. We want to be a part of it, so we live in faithfulness.

Many believers have an expectation that the Lord's return must be near because of the prevalence of sin in the world. Surely, we want to see the reign of Satan come to an end, so we long for the Lord's return. But we simply do not know how long it will be until He returns. We must remain faithful until He does return.

9. Do you expect the Lord to return before your own death? Why, or why not? How does your belief affect how you live your life?

As we all painfully know, we currently reside in corruptible bodies—a point that Paul had already forcefully driven home. When in good health, most of us do not think that life in our present bodies is that bad. Let sickness or accident strike, though, and we are reminded once again of our present mortality.

The new body, however, will be immortal, not subject to the woes of this world. Death itself will be eliminated forever. Revelation 21:4 says, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

All this is possible because "*death will be swallowed up in victory*" (1 Cor. 15:54). The original quotation from Isaiah 25:8 says, "He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces..."

We think also of John 3:16: *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* God gave His Son, and His Son gave His life. His death paid the price for all our sins, and Christians have everlasting life. So the victory belongs to God, and we give Him all the glory. But the benefits belong to us.

Mocking death, Paul declared, *"Death, where is your victory, death, where is your sting?"* (1 Cor. 15:55). This is a free rendering of Hosea 13:14. As Christians, we also can mock death, for it does not have the final say in the life of the believer.

Although we may have to face the prospect of death, we are promised, *"The last enemy to be abolished is death"* (1 Cor. 15:26).

"Sin is the deadly poison that has led to death" (Fee). We all know the "sting" that is felt when a loved one dies. While we are permitted to grieve, we should not do so as those who have "no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13).

10. From what two Old Testament passages did Paul quote (vs. 53-55)?

Various preachers of years past became known for their "fire and brimstone" sermons. But manipulating people by playing to their fears is a very questionable tactic. Even so, we do need to tell people the bad news of sin and judgment if they are to appreciate the good news of forgiveness and salvation. Accepting Christ must be a total commitment of mind and heart.

Many people today fear death because of the pain that may come with it or because they have dreams and plans to accomplish. But they do not realize that they are lost without Christ. We need to inform them and urge them to share in Christ's victory over death.

11. We know that death holds no terror for us as Christians. How terrifying ought we portray it to unbelievers? What is the proper place for discussion of death and eternal punishment as we talk to unbelievers?

If there were no sin, there would be no death, for death is the result of sin (Gen. 3:1-19). Because of that original Edenic sin, we continue to suffer the consequences of sin (Rom. 5:12-21). We cannot, however, place all of the blame on Adam and Eve. As individuals we have chosen to break God's law and have become sinners by choice (James 1:13-15).

"The power of sin is the law" (1 Cor. 15:56) because the law exposes us as sinners (Rom. 3:20). As Paul said, *"I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'" (7:7).* Likewise, he said earlier in Romans, *"For where no law is, there is no transgression"* (4:15). The Apostle John said, *"Sin is the transgression of the law"* (1 John 3:4; cf. Gal. 3:10).

12. How is the law the "power of sin" (v. 56)?

Under the law, Paul knew that he was a condemned sinner. In Christ, though, he knew that he was free from condemnation (John 5:24; Rom. 8:1).

Considering the glorious future awaiting him caused Paul to burst forth into praise. Truly, there is victory in Jesus (1 Cor. 15:57). This victory is not one that we have accomplished through our own efforts; it has been given to us through God's grace. It includes victory in the past, the present, and the future. We have been redeemed, we are being sanctified, and we shall yet be glorified (Rom. 8:30; 2 Thess. 1:10).

Because of the hope of a future resurrection, Paul called upon the Corinthian saints to be *"stedfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."* (1 Cor. 15:58). "Nothing we do for Him will ever be wasted or lost" (Wiersbe).

13. What does it mean that we have victory through Jesus Christ (v. 57)?

The thrust of this lesson is the victory of the resurrection. Certainly the idea of spending eternity in Heaven in glorified bodies ought to fill our hearts with gratitude to God.

We can also thank Him for the sense of purpose He gives us. Knowing that this life is not all there is to our existence fills

us with meaning. Knowing that we can help to lead others to share in this victory gives us a mission as well. We are grateful for the fellowship of believers that we are part of and for the encouragement those believers give us.

Finally, we thank God that someone cared enough to share with us the good news of this victory. Because someone cared, we can be included. With whom will we share it?

14. God gives us victory through Jesus. What specifically do you thank Him for in giving you this victory?

CONCLUSION

Our Work Is Not Finished

With verse 57 our text ends in triumph. Thanks to God, *victory* is ours! Dovetailing from answer #13, let us read one more verse, for verse 58 tells us what to be doing here and now in addition to speaking our thanks to God: "*Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, 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.*"

Verse 58 thus gives us our job assignment for this week, the one following, and all the weeks afterward. And as we labor we constantly think forward to the day when Jesus will come back to earth, in person and visible (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

Can you imagine that wonderful day when our own spiritual bodies will soar aloft along with those of all of God's saints? Yet the blessed saints are not the only dead ones who will return to life at the trumpet blast and Jesus' shout. A great many will be aroused to hear the sad sentence, "*Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Matthew 25:41). Their sins are noted in Revelation 21:8. Their lack of concern for others and failure to do anything good is stressed in Matthew 25:41-46. What a sobering thought!

So let our conclusion still be 1 Corinthians 15:58: "*stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord.*"

PRAYER

Thank You for hope, dear Father in Heaven, for the hope generated by the promises of our God who never has broken even the least of His promises. Thank You for the assurance of spiritual bodies and life everlasting, for the assurance of an end to death and its power, for the assurance of eternal victory.

By Your grace we rest secure in the assurance of Heaven and eternity; by Your grace may we here and now be always abounding in the work of the Lord. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Be faithful in the work of the Lord.