

#30 Bible Study~06-05-21~1 Cor. 15.35-49

Having argued that Christ has been raised from the dead, that every believer will likewise be raised when Christ returns and that disbelief in this truth concretely affects our present moral life, Paul now addresses the second major problem the Corinthians had with the resurrection. They had known that dead bodies decay and are destroyed. They question, 'What will the resurrected body be like?'

Then Paul argues for the possibility that the resurrection body will be different since God will act to transform our perishable dead bodies, and the mortal flesh of those who are alive, into imperishable new-creation bodies like Christ's. This will happen because our bodies are inseparably united to Jesus Christ and will participate in God's final victory over sin and death (vs. 50-57).

Let nothing move us away from Christ. Give yourselves, in the light of this future resurrection, fully to the service of Christ, because now you understand that your self-effacing labor to others in this body in him is worth it all (v. 58).

THE POSSIBILITY OF THE RESURRECTION BODY (1 Cor. 15:35-49)

So, someone listening to Paul might say, if there is to be a future resurrection as you say, how can dead, decomposed, rotting corpses come back to life? What kind of bodies will they have? (v. 35). The questions express puzzlement at best and challenge at worst to Paul's arguments in the previous sections of the chapter. Isn't a resurrection body inconceivable? Aren't dead corpses coming back to life impossible to imagine? His response to the first question (how) is given in verses 50-57, to the second (what kind of body) in verses 36-49.

THE SEED ANALOGY (1 Cor. 15:36-38)

How foolish! is literally, "You fool!" (cf. Luke 11:40; 12:20). This may be a standard rhetorical device to belittle the questioner before a revelation of knowledge is offered. With what kind of body will they come? is first answered with a seed analogy. A farmer plants a seed in the ground, it dies (not actually but figuratively), then God brings it back to life and gives to it the body that he has chosen, each kind of seed he has its own body (v. 38). This latter shows the contrast, differentiation and variety without loss of identity that God accomplishes in plant bodies.

The seed corresponds to our perishable, rotting body that must die first, whereas the embodied life that emerges from death represents our new resurrection body. The perishable body that is laid in the ground in death is not the same body that emerges in new life, but the seed image strongly implies continuity of identity. Somehow we will know ourselves to be ourselves in the new body, and we will know others in their new bodies as the same persons we knew in their perishable bodies (cf. Luke 24:30-43).

When a grain of wheat is dropped into the ground, its husk quickly decays, and even the live core disintegrates. The life of the seed, rather than its material substance, provides the continuity of existence. As the rootlets begin to grow, they draw nourishment from the earth, and by the chemistry of sun and rain the small seed soon becomes a large plant. The plant bears no external resemblance to the seed, nor is the bulk of its tissue drawn from the seed; nevertheless, the continuity is undeniable.

There is persistence of type because a given seed will always produce its own kind. Identity of type is not incompatible with discontinuity of substance. Continuity of individuality is assured by the persistence of the personality, which God will reclothe with a body. Jesus' statement, "all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice and come out; those who have done good unto the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29)

This assumes the preservation of individuality, since those that have been buried will be restored to life. The restoration, however, is not a reconstitution of the original body that was interred, but a new structure patterned

on the resurrection body of Christ. "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven" (1 Cor. 15:49).

THE FLESH ANALOGY (1 Cor. 15:39)

All flesh is not the same presents another analogy to the resurrection body. The different types of flesh (skin) that cover the present creation's human and animate bone structures provide another example of the rich diversity of God's creation. The argument is from the lesser (human flesh, animals, birds, fish) to the greater (the new creation of the resurrection body).

DIFFERENCES IN FORM & CHARACTER OF EARTHLY AND HEAVENLY BODIES (1 Cor. 15:40–41)

Again Paul points to the variety of God's creation of different earthly and heavenly bodies and to the different splendor each has. Not that resurrection bodies will have different degrees of honor, but if God is so imaginative in creating bodies in this present creation, how much more can he create a resurrection body that is unimaginably glorious!

THE IMPERISHABLE SPIRITUAL BODY OF THE RESURRECTION (1 Cor. 15:42–49)

Paul now applies these analogies directly to the resurrection of the dead by returning to the seed language that combines continuity with radical transformation (vs. 42–44). The resurrection body is the opposite of the earth body.

Here the emphasis is more on discontinuity (but see at v. 53) between the present body and the future body. The proper distinction between the two types of embodiments is not material or physical versus immaterial or nonphysical but a body suited for the mere functioning of the *psychē*, the life principle, a body destined because of sin to die and to corrupt (Gen_3:19), in contrast to a body suited for the full functioning of the Holy Spirit, the imperishable resurrection body. The promise is that we will have a physical body of some form and substance like Jesus had when he rose from death to life. Remember the angel told the disciples staring up to heaven that we would see him come as we saw him go.

The future body is not a mere physical body (resuscitation) but a new creation of God that befits the transformation of our character into the pattern of life in Christ effected by the Holy Spirit, a body suited for the full expression of love (chap. 13). As vs. 38–41 observe, each species having a body suited to its environment even in the present creation.

The first man Adam became a living being (v. 45) refers to Gen_2:7, with Paul's addition of first, which prepares him to refer to Christ as the last Adam (cf. 1Co_15:21-22; Rom_5:12-19). The nature of the body of the resurrected Christ is described as a life-giving spirit (v. 45), "Spirit that gives life" from the dead. Probably this is a reference to both the salvation experience of the Corinthians and the power of life in the future resurrection of the dead that is mediated through Christ (v. 21).

The order of the natural first, then the spiritual (v. 46), helps us keep Adam's significance in proper perspective to Christ and his importance to the human plight and God's triumphant reversal. Only when the natural with all its limitations and qualifications has been laid down in death can the Spirit fully transform our body and allow us to give full expression to the indwelling Spirit of Christ.

The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven (v. 47). Then in v. 49 comes a promise we often overlook. "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven." We are reminded of the fragility of the life of the man of dust every Ask Wednesday and at every Funeral or Memorial Service with a Committal, "Dust you were and to dust you shall return."

The reason why death is not the end of the story is because it is not the end of God's work. We were created in the image of God, (cf. Eph. 4:24) but with the fall into sin, that beautiful image became like looking at yourself in a shattered mirror. I would tie v. 49 with I Cor. 13:12 "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to

face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” God’s final act in the redemption drama is the restoration of the Imago Deo, image of God, in his children.

That is why the people of God have prayer for centuries, “Even so Lord Jesus, come quickly.” We are eager to see God finish his restoration project, not just on us, but on all of creation.

Next: 1 Cor. 15:50–58.