

Life After Death

1 Corinthians 15:35–49 | 05.21.2017 | Body Life @OBC

It's been said . . . there are two kinds of people.

Those who think that there are two kinds of people . . . and those who don't.

Well, I must confess. I'm in the first category . . . b/c I think there are two kinds of people.

And I think that . . . I think . . . because the Bible says so.

Jesus says . . . There are sheep and goats . . . wheat and chaff . . . good vines + bad

Paul too . . . speaks of those Spirit + those in the flesh . . . those in Adam + those in X

As **1 Corinthians 2** says . . . there are those who have the mind of Christ . . . and those who only have the mind of natural men

Indeed . . . in our chapter today . . . we find a striking contrast between those who think the dead will be raised to life . . . and those who do not.

In fact . . . I'm not sure there could be a more fundamental difference than this . . .

Either . . you believe that Death comes after Life . . .OR . . . you believe Life comes after Death

There's nothing that separates people more than what they think about life + death

If you think that death comes after life . . . then you will (should) do everything you can to pack your life full of stuff –

Food, drink, money, clothes, games, fame, power, sex, vacations, or other luxuries

OR It could be a life devoted to good works . . . service, giving, politics, even ministry

Those who think life ends in death . . . will may live radically . . . making BUCKET LISTS . . . getting tattoos that say YOLO . . . living with the maxim of Carpe Diem – Seize the Day

OR . . . or they may focus all their energy on being responsible . . . creating job security, financial security, family security . . . on and on.

That's one kind of person . . . The other kind of person believes that life comes AFTER death.

They believe this fallen world will come to an end . . . and that there is something that comes after . . . **and they live accordingly.**

Now . . . it should be said . . . this might lead them to treat this world like plastic silverware . . . disposable and unimportant.

But it should give them and us incredible hope that when we lose our lives . . . we can have hope that the best life is yet to come.

This is what the Bible teaches . . .

It's not too much to say . . . the whole Bible is about how the dead come back to life.

From Enoch to Isaac . . . from Elisha to Israel . . . from Lazarus to Jesus to us . . .
. . . the Bible tells of how death is defeated and life is given to those set to die.

If you're not familiar with the Bible ... the promise of an afterlife isn't some weird zombie thing

No . . . this is a story of abundant, eternal LIFE after death . . .

It is a word of comfort to those who believe that your best life is later, after death.

And a word of correction to those who believe your best life is now.

Indeed, this is how the Corinthians approached life . . . you might find a book in their homes called ***How to Have Your Best Life Now*** . . .

They were a port city . . . a trade city . . . where money rolled in . . . food and drink flowed . . . and sex and leisure and entertainment were the norm.

So passionately did they pursue food and drink . . . they would sometimes make themselves vomit their meals . . . just to eat some more.

So . . . in this context . . . it's no surprise the resurrection didn't make sense.

In fact, just before Paul came to Corinth . . . he preached the resurrection in Athens

And the reception was mixed. In fact . . . some people thought Paul was out of his mind.

In that period . . . there was a general aversion to the body . . .

. . . hence the freedom to do with the body whatever they wanted.

. . . They believed in something of an after-life but it was typically immaterial . . .

. . . For them the body did not factor into the future . . .

Thus . . . the concept of resurrection would have confused many . . .

And Paul would have to labor hard to explain what it meant and why it mattered.

In fact . . . this is what we find in verse 35 . . . as Paul raises the question . . .

. . . about HOW the dead are raised to life.

Speaking about the Resurrection

He asks: (v. 35) ***How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?***

In context . . . Paul has just spent 34 verses explaining the relationship between

the resurrection and the gospel (vv. 1–11)

the resurrection and faith (vv. 12–19)

the resurrection and its application to believers (vv. 20–34)

Now he comes to answer a skeptics question . . .

We know it is a skeptics question . . . because of the way he speaks in v. 36

The ESV softens it . . . “you foolish person”

But in Greek it’s just one word: **Fool** . . .

Like Psalm 14 . . . which says “The fool says in his heart there is no god” . . . Paul now addresses his words to the Fool . . . who denies the power of God to raise the dead.

He’s not speaking to sincere inquirers here . . . but either to a fictitious skeptic . . . or to a group of people in Corinth who publicly questioned HOW God could raise the dead.

And . . . what he does here is incredibly instructive.

To Greco-Roman skeptics who had an understanding of agriculture and interest cosmology—the nature and essence of heaven and earth —Paul appeals to creation.

Like Jesus . . . he makes an argument from nature to explain the logic of resurrection.

IOW . . . he doesn’t call them fools and proceed to tell them how wrong they are.

Rather . . . he begins with ideas found in nature . . . ideas that he and they could agree about . . . so that he build a bridge for them to understand.

Christians . . . we have to learn how to argue this way.

If we are going to effectively communicate to skeptics, to our children, to a lost world . . . **we must learn how to begin with common ground and move towards the truth.**

In this example . . . Paul asks the question and proceeds to answer it with 2 analogies from creation . . . THEN he follows with two comparisons that build on these two analogies.

In our time today . . . we are going to look at the content of Paul’s words.

But don’t miss the FORM – how he takes common beliefs and drives towards greater truth
This is practice we must work at to communicate truth to skeptics and doubters.

So where does he begin?

He begins with an analogy about sowing and growing that will lead into a second analogy about different kinds of flesh, different kinds of glory.

We'll take them one at a time.

Look at verses 36–38 . . . READ

In these three verses, Paul turns his eyes to the field.

If you lived in Corinth . . . it would only be a short walk into the fertile fields of the country.

Like Jesus' audiences . . . Paul's hearers would have understood his farming metaphor.

Paul points to the field and says in effect

The seeds you sow . . . how do they grow?

The answer is they are buried in the ground . . . and after some time they arise again.

He says they die (in v. 36), not because he is making a horticultural claim, but because to the outside observer . . . the seed has been buried; it has "died."

Only . . . such death does not end in death . . . it results in life.

So too the resurrection.

He compares the body buried in the ground as a bare kernel, literally a naked seed.

The word for "bare" is *gymnos* . . . which means naked. We get the word gymnasium . . . from *gymnos* . . . because the gyms of Roman world were filled with naked people.

So . . . Paul speaks of the dead body . . . as a naked seed sown into the ground.

Like the seed which sprouts to new life . . . so the resurrected body will be raised to life.

In this analogy . . . Paul gives a plausibility structure for how resurrection could happen.

For those who might have imagined resurrection like a half-dead corpse re-emerging from the grave . . . Paul gives an image of life that is both beautiful and true.

After all . . . what is more glorious than the new life of Spring, or the field budding with flowers??

As v. 38 says . . . just as God has sovereignly given every seed a body as he chooses, so God will give the dead a new body as he chooses when he raises them to life.

So . . . this is Paul's first analogy. It explains resurrection in terms of nature that cannot be denied . . . and more . . . it makes plausible, even attractive to the skeptic a new way of life.

The **next analogy** follows from the this one . . .

. . . And it both continues and expands the first.

In v. 38 . . . Paul speaks about the body that comes from each seed.

He assigns to God the sovereign rule to grant each seed a certain body.

He is speaking abstractly . . . about seeds and bodies, making the point that there is a relationship between seed and body . . . tomato seeds make tomato plants; seeds of wheat grow wheat plants . . . and so forth

Now . . . he's expanding our horizons to say everything in creation has a certain nature.

Verse 39 he covers the earth . . . and he speaks of different kinds of flesh – **READ**

If you compare Paul's language here to what you find in Genesis, there is a strong correlation. Just as Genesis 1 speaks of the different kinds of seed and different kinds of animals . . . so here, Paul says in nature there are different kinds of flesh.

Then in **v. 41** he moves to the heavens . . . and speaks of different kinds of glory

And in between . . . in v. 40 . . . he makes the contrast between earth and heaven

So Paul is using nature again to explain the way God has made various objects in creation, each with their own nature . . . either flesh if they're on the earth . . . or glory in the heavens.

And he is about ready to explain how these creations help us think about resurrection.

And here is what I think he is doing.

1. He is . . . reaffirming God's as sovereign creator . . . who has made the world as he desires.
2. He is . . . contrasting flesh and glory
3. He is . . . setting up the transition from humanity made of dust . . . to humanity made of glory.

Don't miss this . . .

In v. 39 . . . Paul describes everything on earth as having a certain flesh.

In v. 41 . . . he describes everything in heaven as having a certain glory.

In v. 40 . . . he sets these in contrast to one another

And the reason . . . I believe he sets them at odds . . . is B/C of what he will say in **vv. 45–49** . . . **that just as in Adam we born from the dust . . . in X we may be born of glory.**

So . . . With this analogy . . . he has not said how this transference from dust to glory is possible . . . but he's about to.

Because look at where this second analogy takes us . . . **READ v. 42**

After giving us two analogies . . . Paul moves to the resurrection itself . . .

vv. 42–44 set in contrast four characteristics of the earthly body and the heavenly body.

And we need to see what these means . . .

But we can't look at these characteristics . . . until we settle this point:

To a people who denied the resurrection . . . but were fascinated with the glory of heaven

Paul is explaining how a mortal might dwell in glory forever.

And what he is about to say . . . is that man dwells in immortal glory NOT by shedding his body and living in some body-less state . . .

NO . . . heavenly glory is experienced by the man of dust being buried like a seed, so that when God grants him life . . . he will be raised to new life.

And when he is raised to new life . . . he will inhabit a glorious, resurrected body which is imperishable, glorious, powerful, and made alive by the Spirit.

This is where Paul is going . . . and he uses these two analogies to help build a bridge for skeptics to get in on the glory.

So . . . Let's see what glory looks like.

1. Four Characteristics of the Immortal Body (vv. 42–44)

In vv. 42–44 . . . Paul makes four contrasts between the natural bodies and spiritual bodies.

More specifically, he makes three contrasts that describe the difference between natural and spiritual bodies, which is contrasted last in v. 44.

First (v. 42a) Paul says . . . **What is sown perishable; what is raised imperishable.**

Simply put . . . this describes the corruptibility of human life. We are not likes can of spam which last forever . . . we are perishable goods . . . here for a season and then no more.

Our lives are corruptible . . . meaning they are subject to death and disease.

In our sanitized modern world, we have removed much disease . . . which a gift from God . . . but this blinds us to the way our bodies are constantly threatened by death.

Our bodies are bent with sore joints and breeding grounds for deadly bacteria . . . We are all genetically predisposed to certain maladies . . . **In short . . . our lives are perishable.**

But the life to come is incorruptible, indestructible, impervious to disease and death.
Xian . . . If your life is threatened by disease . . . take comfort in this truth.

Next He says . . . **It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory**

The brutal truth of dying is that it is dishonorable . . .

While Proverbs can speak of honor given to the gray-haired . . . death is a humbling thing

And it is meant to be . . . death was not God's plan for the human race.
It is the universal judgment for those like Adam who have sinned against God.

Born in pride . . . God must humble us . . . and nothing is more humbling, more dishonoring than death

And yet . . . that is not the final word. For those in Christ, there is a glorious future.
And this too comes as a comfort to those whom death pursues.

Then He says . . . **It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.**

Again, the contrast is simple . . . our natural bodies are weak, easily tired and fatigued.

Even the **strongest men** get old/weak . . . the **most industrious women** get tired/frail

This is the nature of our world . . . and worse . . . the nature of our bodies.

Sure . . . You can take vitamins . . . lather yourself with essential oils . . . eat nothing but a Paleo diet . . . but ultimately the flesh will give out . . . the medicines will fail.

We do not have the strength in ourselves to keep ourselves alive . . .

But in X's resurrection . . . there is a new kind of life that has power over the grave.

And this is the point Paul is driving at . . .

Natural bodies . . . the ones given to us as part of Adam's race are going to die . . .

But Spiritual bodies . . . the ones given to us in Christ's resurrection will be raised to life

And these bodies will experience the infinite pleasures of dwelling forever in God's kingdom.

Friends . . . this is the bedrock of our Christian hope.

This is what distinguishes Christians from non-Christians.

We believe that the best life begins after death.

And We refuse to buy the lie that this life is all there is.

We refuse to believe that if we don't get what we want here and now . . . we will be forever unhappy or unfulfilled . . . **or that God has somehow slighted us!**

This is lie . . . Satan has used against countless millions.

He leads them to believe that there is no life after death . . . or that this life is so good that it is worth ignoring or rejecting the life that is to come . . . in Christ.

But We know . . . that this life is but a fleeting shadow

. . . our bodies with all their enflamed passions and visceral desires

. . . are only vain dreams compared to the solid state of the resurrected life.

Do you see the difference?

Some people believe that what we can see, taste, touch, and feel . . . is the key to life.

And so they throw themselves at a thimble full of earthly pleasure and forsake an ocean-full of heavenly life in Christ.

But Christians know that what we cannot see now . . . is actually . . . life itself.

Christ's resurrection is the solid reality . . . This world will pass away and in its place will come a world full of life, joy, and infinite pleasures in God's right hand.

And what makes the difference between life before death OR life after death?

The answer is singular . . . it is what your relationship with Jesus is like.

Not surprisingly . . . This is where **verses 45–49** brings us . . .

To a four-fold comparison between the first Adam and the last Adam, a comparison between those living before death . . . or those living for life after death.

In v. 44 . . . Paul makes the point that if there is a natural body, there must of necessity Be a spiritual body.

WHY IS THAT?? I think the logic follows the two analogies Paul has made . . .

Just as there must be a plant that comes from the seed . . .
AND Just as there must be a heavenly glory that complements earthly flesh . . .

So there must be a spiritual body that comes from and complements an natural earthly seed . . .

IOW For every follower of Christ who dies in this age, his or her body is buried as a seed that will be raised to glory on the last day.

What a wonderful vision this is . . .

Scattered now throughout the world . . . are Christ's seeds awaiting the harvest.

These buried dead may be entombed in a grave . . . buried instead of burned because they trusted in their bodily resurrection.

Others may have no marker . . . their bodies drowned because of their faith in Jesus.

No matter . . . on that final day . . . all will be raised to glory. None will be forgotten.

In fact . . . on the day of Christ's return . . . there will be an eruption of life on the earth that far outstrips any Spring . . .

The dead in Christ will be raised as they receive their spiritual body . . .

And in this eschatological harvest . . . the glory of God will cover the earth like the waters cover the sea . . . like the fruit trees covered the Garden of Eden.

This seems to be something of Paul's logic in these verses . . . but he goes further.

In fact . . . he goes back to the Garden of Eden itself. . . and quotes from **Genesis 2:7** . . .

He contrasts the life Adam received with the life Christ gives.

And this is what he says . . . READ vv. 45–49.

In these five verses we find four contrasts between the first Adam and the last Adam, which urge the believer (and the skeptic) to set their hope on the Christ who gives life.

First . . . (from v. 45) whereas Adam received life from the Spirit, the Son of God as the second Adam has received the Spirit . . . to give life.

To be sure . . . this does not deny Christ's humanity . . . rather, it tells us that as the God-man, Jesus has the right to grant life to all those whom the Father has given to him

Indeed, this is what we see now . . . Christ granting to repent, believe, and enjoy his Spirit, but even more . . . he will give life when he gives Spiritual bodies to his saints.

That's the first contrast . . . the second Adam gives life.

Second . . . (from v. 46) the natural man precedes the spiritual man. And the spiritual man comes to surpass the natural man.

The significance is this: In this age . . . Adam's race is dying, but there is coming a day . . . when a new humanity will stand permanent in God's world . . . this new humanity is where life is found . . . **And this life comes on the other side of death.**

Third . . . (from v. 47) the first man was of the earth, the second man is of heaven..

IOW . . . while Adam's origins are of earthly dust . . . Christ's origins are of heavenly glory

Just as we shared in Adam's dust . . . those in Christ will share in his glory.

This does not mean we will share in receiving his praise and worship.

It means we will have the same glorious kind of body that Christ now enjoys.

What does this mean?

It means our capacity to love, rejoice, praise, and serve will so far exceed our earthly pleasures . . . it will make our greatest earthly joy seem like one drop of honey, compared to the ever-increasing sweetness of God.

And this shared glory is the fourth contrast (from vv. 48–49)

. . . it states that just as the man of dust led a humanity into the dust of death . . .
. . . so the man of glory will lead his new humanity in the glory of life.

Verse 49 uses the language of "bearing the image of the man of heaven" to say just as Adam's race was clothed in corruption, weakness, and death

. . . So Christ's new humanity will be clothed in glorious power to enjoy eternal life of God.

IOW . . . what Adam lost when he sinned . . . has been reclaimed by Christ and now given to his followers so that we may share his glory . . . forever and ever.