

# High Peaks Bible Fellowship

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## The Doctrine of the Resurrection What will the resurrection body be like? 1 Corinthians [15:35-58](#)

### Introduction

- The Apostle Paul had already proven that the resurrection of the dead was possible. Christ had been resurrected, and every believer in Him should expect to be resurrected just as He was. So in the first thirty-four verses of this chapter Paul refuted the claim that the resurrection of the dead was impossible. Now in this section of the chapter, Paul will continue to address some of the other arguments or objections raised by those who were denying the resurrection of the dead. One of the main reasons some Corinthians denied the resurrection was because they had a wrong idea of what the resurrection body would be like.



### The objection of Paul's opponents (1 Cor [15:35](#))

- Paul had just finished proving the truth of the resurrection of the dead, BUT there were still some people who wanted to show the foolishness of such a belief. Their main objection to the resurrection of the dead was expressed in a two-part question:
  1. How are the dead raised? In other words, "How could the dead possibly be raised?" How can the particles of a dead and decayed body be restored to life? Even after Paul has already proved that the resurrection of the dead is possible, he knew that some of his opponents would still say, "The dead cannot be raised!" They would argue that it is impossible to gather and re-assemble the decomposed particles of a dead person's body, and their reason for continuing to say this was based on their misconception of what the resurrection body would be like.
  2. With what kind of body do they come? This second question implies that there is no other kind of body a person could have other than the one that has now died and is impossible to reconstruct.
- In both of these questions, we see that they are not the questions of someone who is genuinely seeking to understand the truth. They are questions posed by Paul's opponents among the false teachers in Corinth. In that sense, they are very much like the question about the resurrection that was asked of Jesus by the Sadducees, who also denied the resurrection of the dead ([Matt 22:23-32](#)).

### Understanding the true nature of the resurrection body (1 Cor [15:36-41](#))

The main assumption of Paul's opponents was that resurrection meant reconstructing the former body which the person had during this lifetime. Throughout the rest of the chapter Paul will show that this is a false assumption.

### [An illustration from the life cycle of plants \(1 Cor 15:36-38\)](#)

- Paul's first two words in verse 36 tell us what he thinks of this objection to the doctrine of the resurrection. His response helps us to understand that the questions in verse 35 were not sincere questions, but manipulative "trick questions" posed by the foolish opponents of God's truth.
- In this illustration from the life cycle of plants, Paul is saying that the present body must die and decay. Like a seed that has been sown, you will never see the seed again; its original form is gone forever. His point here is that the old body decays and will never be reconstituted. The word *dies* is the Greek term *apothnesko* which comes from the root word "to die" with an added preposition that intensifies the meaning. It is a strong word that denotes the physical death of an organism. This tells us that when a person dies, the old body will completely decay never to return again.

- The sown seed does not come back in its original form; it does not re-appear as exactly the same thing you placed into the soil. You sow a simple naked seed, but what comes up is an entire plant. The plant is related to the seed, but it is completely different in form. Paul's point here is that the same is true of the resurrection body. When a person's body dies and is placed into the grave, we should not expect it to be resurrected in exactly the same form as it had before. When Paul says, "You do not sow the body which is to be," he is saying that the present body is not the future body. The body laid in the grave is not the one which will be resurrected.



- Paul could have mentioned millions of other types of seeds with a wide variety of forms, and this brings up the amazing creativity of God as the designer of life in His created universe. God Himself is ultimately responsible for the variety of life forms, and He gave each type of plant the specific form that He desired to give. In this verse Paul's point is that since God created an amazing variety of seeds, we must also credit Him with the amazing differences in the plants which arise from those simple seeds. If this is true for simple plant life, how much more is it true for human life and the design of the resurrection body that He will provide after death? Paul emphasizes here that the Creator God is capable of giving people resurrection bodies that are much different than their earthly bodies, while yet maintaining the identity and continuity of their individual personalities in the process.

#### [An illustration from the differences between the forms of other creatures \(1 Cor 15:39\)](#)

- Here it is as if Paul is saying, "Look around at the other forms of life God has created!" God is quite capable of giving different creatures many different forms, even throughout their own earthly life cycles. If we see this is true during the earthly life cycle of God's creatures, surely it is not too difficult to believe that God can do similar things after death too! One purely natural example of this is the difference in form between a caterpillar and a butterfly, but our best example is seen in the differences between Christ's earthly body and His resurrection body.

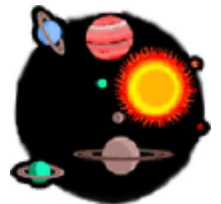


#### [An illustration from the differences between heavenly and earthly bodies \(1 Cor 15:40\)](#)

- Here Paul extends his analogy beyond the realm of planet Earth by comparing the glory of the earthly bodies he just mentioned with the glory of the heavenly bodies, the objects in the night sky. God has given each created thing its own qualities and abilities to glorify Him, and they are vastly different.

#### [An illustration from the differences among the heavenly bodies themselves \(1 Cor 15:41\)](#)

- Here Paul goes on to say that even among the heavenly bodies themselves, there are amazing differences in their forms, capabilities, and capacity for glorifying their Creator.



### **Five characteristics of the resurrection body (1 Cor [15:42-49](#))**

#### [Imperishable \(1 Cor 15:42\)](#)

The earthly body that goes into the grave is perishable; however, the resurrection body is imperishable.

- Perishable = the Greek word is *phthora* which means "being subject to decay or corruption." Another connotation is, "subject to moral decay, or ultimate misery in hell." This is a perfect word to describe the condition of fallen people living in a fallen world. When applied to our earthly bodies, this term points to the ultimate fate of every living creature. Just like the seed, at death our bodies are sown for decay.
- Imperishable = this is the Greek word *aphtharsia* which means incorruptibility, purity, or genuineness; it is sometimes used to mean unending existence or perpetuity. This word seems perfect for describing the type of body one would require to live an eternal existence without sin or blemish of any kind.

#### [Glorious \(1 Cor 15:43a\)](#)

- Dishonor = this is the Greek word *atimia* which can be translated "dishonor, disgrace, indignity, shameful, vile, or lowly." Again, this seems a perfect term for describing the ultimate condition of the earthly body at the time it is sown into the grave.
- Glory = the Greek word used here is *doxa* which can mean "splendor, brightness, excellence, honor, or blessedness."

## Powerful (1 Cor 15:43b)

- Weakness = the Greek word *asthenia* means "frail, feeble, liable to sickness and infirmity." It sometimes conveys the idea of lack of ability to restrain corrupt desires, and the inability to do great things that glorify God. It is certainly true that a person's earthly body is very frail and subject to death from what might look like very small injuries or inconsequential traumas.
- Power = this is the Greek word *dunamis* which means "inherent strength or ability that resides in something by virtue of its nature." It is sometimes used in the context of power for doing mighty works that bring glory to God.

## Spiritual (1 Cor 15:44)

- Natural = the Greek word is *psuchikos* which describes something that is governed by the soul.
- Spiritual = the Greek word is *pneumatikos* which means "governed by the spirit." Notice this verse does not say that in the resurrection everyone will become a disembodied spirit. The verse specifically states that we will each be given a spirit-governed body.
- When Paul says, "If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body," he is answering the objection of someone who might see a contradiction in the phrase *spiritual body*. Paul used a Greek first class conditional clause (which is assumed to be true) to prove that since our bodies now are adapted to life on the level of the soul, then our future resurrection bodies will be adapted to life on the level of the spirit.

## Like the Body of Christ (1 Cor 15:45-49)

- Paul begins by quoting the last part of Genesis [2:7](#) from the Septuagint: "man (Adam) became a living soul (psuche)." Here Paul appeals to the Scriptures for his authority in saying that the body of Adam was focused on life at the level of the earthly soul. Then Paul introduced the second half of his comparison by referring to Christ as the last Adam. We need to understand in what sense Adam was the first while Christ was the last. Adam was certainly the first created human being, as Genesis clearly stated. But as the first human being, Adam was also responsible for the destiny of the human race following his sin in the Garden of Eden. In that sense, Adam was the originator and the responsible leader or head of the human race in its sinful condition. By contrast, Christ has become the last man who could be considered the originator, leader, or responsible head of the human race by blazing the trail into eternal resurrection life.
  - Paul states that Christ became a life-giving spirit to all those who put their faith and trust in what He accomplished for mankind by dying on the cross. Christ is a being who has the power to impart life to those who are related to Him. The term *spirit* (pneuma) is used here as a direct contrast to the term *soul* (psuche) that described Adam. As Adam's body was a natural, soul-centered body, Christ's body is a spirit-centered one. There are several aspects of the contrast between Adam's earthly body and Christ's resurrection body that Paul will now describe in the following verses.
1. The sequence of existence (1 Cor [15:46](#))  
This verse describes the order or sequence of existence for mankind: the natural is first, followed by the spiritual. Every human being starts life in a physical body. Even in the case of the Lord Jesus Christ, He began his incarnate life in a natural physical body, and after His death that natural body was buried in the ground. However, at His resurrection He was given an eternal spiritual body. The natural comes first, followed by the spiritual.
  2. The realm of existence (1 Cor [15:47](#))  
The first man (Adam) was literally made from the dust of the earth (Genesis [2:7](#)). The natural body that he was originally given was well-suited for an existence on planet Earth. The second man (Christ) was given a resurrection body that is well-suited for an eternal existence in heaven. Whatever the resurrection body is like, it will be well-suited to our existence in the heavenly realm.
  3. The certainty of these events (1 Cor [15:48-49](#))  
These last two verses of the section state the absolute certainty that these things are true and that they will happen just as they have been described. In this life we are all very familiar with the earthly existence that is the plight of mankind. Here Paul is saying that the heavenly existence he has described is just as certain as the earthly one we are experiencing. In this verse, Adam is the earthly one and his descendants are those who are earthly. Therefore, Christ is the heavenly one, and those who have trusted in Christ are those who are heavenly. Paul uses the fact that we all have earthly bodies in this life as a guarantee of the certainty of life in a resurrection body in eternity future. Just as we are now actually experiencing the "image of the earthly," we will

certainly bear the image of the heavenly in the future.

## Summary of the Characteristics of the Resurrection Body

| Description or Characteristic                            | Earthly Body  | Resurrection Body   |
|--|---|---|
| 1. Ability to sustain life over time.                    | <u>Perishable:</u><br>Subject to deterioration and finally death and decay.   | <u>Imperishable:</u><br>Incapable of deterioration; the 2nd law of thermodynamics will no longer apply.     |
| 2. Value and potential for honoring and glorifying God.  | <u>Dishonor:</u><br>Characterized by disgrace, shame, and indignity.  | <u>Glory:</u><br>Characterized by excellence, honor, splendor, brightness, and blessedness.                 |
| 3. Physical ability to carry out one's intended purpose. | <u>Weakness:</u><br>Fragile, feeble, liable to sickness and infirmity, lack of ability to restrain corrupt desires. | <u>Power:</u><br>Inherent strength or ability; capable of the highest service before God without weariness. |
| 4. Intended sphere of existence.                         | <u>Natural:</u><br>Limited to life in the fallen, earthly realm.  | <u>Spiritual:</u><br>Suited to life in an eternal and heavenly realm.                                       |
| 5. Basic orientation, tendency, or focus.                | <u>Adam-like:</u><br>Tending downward toward sinfulness and deterioration.  | <u>Christ-like:</u><br>Tending upward toward righteousness and holiness.                                    |

## What will happen to living believers' bodies when the Lord returns? (1 Cor [15:50-57](#))

From all that Paul has said we might get the impression that every human being must experience physical death and the decay of the body in the grave. But Paul now discusses one other case that could happen to a particular group of believers at a specific time in history.

### The natural body would never survive in heaven (1 Cor [15:50](#))

- Here Paul summarizes much of what he said about the natural body and why it is unsuitable for our future existence in eternity. He says that a natural body which consists merely of flesh and blood would never survive in the eternal kingdom of God. He already told us that the natural body is perishable, but what is needed for an eternal existence is a body that is imperishable. Therefore, the earthly body must be exchanged for one that is imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual, and like Christ's.

### Some believers get resurrection bodies without first dying (1 Cor [15:51](#))

- A mystery is something that cannot be known apart from direct revelation from God. In the historical progress of biblical revelation, a mystery is something that was not previously revealed but which is now being made known to all future generations. We know that God (through Paul) had previously revealed to the Thessalonians that believers who had already fallen asleep in Christ would not miss the rapture of the Church (1 Thess [4:13-18](#)). In that passage Paul had said that the dead in Christ would rise first, followed by those who are alive at the time of His coming. But in the Thessalonian passage Paul had given no details about the condition of the bodies of believers who would be taken up to be with the Lord.
- The mystery Paul reveals here in 1 Cor [15:51](#) is: "We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed." Previously Paul had told the Thessalonians that not all would die before the coming of the Lord, so this cannot be the additional mystery he is now revealing. The new revelation here is that all will be changed. Paul is basically saying that believers who remain alive until the coming of the Lord will not have to die in order to receive their resurrection bodies. Whether believers are alive or dead, at the rapture of the Church their bodies will be changed from perishable to imperishable, from natural to spiritual, with all of the characteristics Paul has

described throughout this section of the chapter.

### How and When this change will happen (1 Cor 15:52)

- As Paul continues in this verse, he tells us how and when this change will happen. The change will be instantaneous, in a moment (atomos). This is the same Greek word from which our English word *atom* is derived, and it literally means "uncut or indivisible." This change will happen within the smallest possible unit of time. In the ancient world, the smallest perceptible unit of time was the time it took for a person to blink his eye. From this we can see that resurrection is not an evolutionary process which requires any significant amount of time.
- The exact historical moment for this change will be "at the last trumpet." Paul gives us help in determining when this trumpet will sound, and why it can be considered the last of its kind. He has identified this event as one at which both living and dead believers will be changed and will rise together. There is only one event in Scripture which corresponds to these circumstances, and that is at the Rapture of the Church before the Great Tribulation. There is no other time in biblical history when both living and dead believers are called upward together. So this trumpet is the last trumpet of the Church Age, and it signifies the closing of a remarkable and important period of biblical history.
- The key point of the mystery Paul is revealing in this verse is that we will all be changed. The Greek term *changed* is *allasso*, which means "to make something different, to exchange, to transform." At the Rapture of the Church, both living and dead believers will be given their resurrection bodies. As Christ was the first-fruits, so these believers at the end of the Church Age will be the next of many more who will eventually follow after Him in His resurrection.

### Why this change must happen (1 Cor 15:53)

- Now in this verse, Paul tells us why this change must happen. Here Paul expresses the necessity and certainty of the resurrection by emphasizing the word *must* (dei). This important Greek term denotes something that is absolutely necessary. Why will this change happen? Because it must happen based on all that Paul has said about the plan and work of God Himself!
- Unless the perishable body is exchanged for an imperishable one, there is no hope of existence into the future. Unless the mortal body is transformed into an immortal one, any hope of eternal life would be impossible. It is because of this impossibility that this change must occur.

### What will come true WHEN these events occur? (1 Cor 15:54-57)

- The final verses in this section emphasize one of the most important consequences of that resurrection day. The saying Paul provides will become true forever for those who receive their resurrection body. In this saying, Paul is not quoting directly from Scripture but paraphrasing the first part of Isaiah [25:8](#) and Hosea [13:14](#) = "He will swallow up death for all time" and "O Death, where are your thorns? O Sheol, where is your sting?"
- One of the amazing things that believers have to look forward to is their ultimate victory over death, which occurs only because of all Christ has accomplished on our behalf. Every person who has ever lived has agonized under the fear of death, and for those living in their mortal bodies death is indeed something that is greatly to be feared. But for those who know of the certainty of their resurrection, the sting of death can be greatly lessened because we know Christ has gained the ultimate victory for us. In the resurrection body, a believer will never need to fear death again!
- Here Paul explains why death is so fearful. Death carries a wicked sting, but the agony that death holds was actually given to it by the sin, disobedience, and corruption of man. The institution of death itself was only as a consequence of man's sin. And the law, the standards and expectations of God, are what reveal or show man's sin to be what it is. At the end of this section, Paul breaks out into glorious praise and thanksgiving to God, who is the one that has provided everything for our victory over sin and death through the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Concluding exhortation in light of the truth of the doctrine of resurrection**

- *Therefore* = "In light of all that has been said about the resurrection of the dead." Here Paul tells believers how the knowledge of this theological truth should impact our behavior. As is true everywhere in Scripture, sound doctrine should always result in good deeds. Theology is never given simply for the sake of increasing our knowledge. Theology should never stand alone, but should always be the foundation for more confident work in

the service of the Lord.

- Two exhortations:
  1. Be steadfast/immovable = These two Greek words mean almost the same thing. The first has the idea of being firmly planted or settled, while the second means to remain persistently in the place where you have been rooted. It seems here that Paul is telling them that they are to anchor themselves firmly to a foundation of sound doctrine, and let nothing pull them away from the truths of God's Word. The false teachers in Corinth were trying to gain followers from within the church, and Paul is essentially saying to them, "Stay put with the sound theology you have been taught, and do not stray toward false teaching, no matter how enticing or popular it may be."
  2. Always abound in the work of the Lord = In this second exhortation the main action word could be translated *super-abound*. It means "to abundantly overflow with excellence." And to this Paul adds: "always, at all times, or forever." This forms a very strong and powerful expression that causes us to ask: "In what activities are we to always overflow with excellence?" Paul answers by saying we are to continually overflow with excellence in the work of the Lord. Work = *ergon*, that which we spend our energy doing. Our efforts should be focused on doing the things that further God's work and plan in this world.
- We can confidently spend ourselves on the Lord's work for the reason Paul provides at the end of this verse. We can know and trust in the fact that our toil, pain, or sacrifice in the work of the Lord will not be vain, empty, or without effect. If we really want to spend ourselves on something that has a guaranteed rate of high return, then we should spend ourselves on the Lord's work.

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