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GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS

#41

**FLESH & BLOOD CANNOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD
 1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-58**

INTRODUCTION

Today we will conclude our study of 1 Corinthians 15 and Paul the Apostle's discussion of the future resurrection of all believers. Thus far, the issue he addresses concerns the Corinthians' denial of any kind of future resurrection of the dead. They simply could not imagine such a thing. Paul establishes the fact of a future resurrection by reminding them of Jesus' own bodily resurrection when His dead body was transformed into a body fit for heaven. Christ was raised with the same body which had been crucified, but His body had been transformed into a glorified body. When Jesus body was put into the tomb, it was one kind of body and when it came out of the tomb, it was the same body, yet different. Paul wants the Corinthians and us to understand that we will experience the same kind of resurrection when the Lord returns. Our dead bodies will be raised; they are the same bodies, yet different. They have been transformed for eternity. The Corinthians appear to think that kind of resurrection, on such a massive scale, is impossible. In verses 35-58, Paul explains just how this transformation takes place. Essentially, the remaining portion of this chapter answers the questions posed in verse 35, *35But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?"* How are the dead raised and when they are raised, what are their bodies like?

1. TWO ANALOGIES HELP EXPLAIN HOW THE DEAD ARE RAISED (15:36-44)

Paul believes it is nothing short of foolish to deny that they will be raised (v36). He offers two rather simple examples to help the Corinthians understand that the "dead" are raised all the time in one form or the other. His first analogy is that of a seed. A seed lives in one form, dies when planted, and then it comes to life in a new form. When the seed dies, a new kind of life results. God's plans for His people are not defeated because we die; death results in a new kind of existence. Paul's point in verses 37-38 is that upon dying, we are given a transformed body which is not like the body that died. Therefore, all believers will experience two distinct forms of existence; one in this life and another after this life. These same bodies will exist after death yet; they will have been forever changed. The fundamental problem with the way the Corinthians are reasoning is that they have neglected to take into account the power of God to raise the dead. The same God who gives new life to dead seeds will give new life to dead bodies. *Philippians 3:20-21, 20For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.*

The second analogy explains that God gives different kinds of bodies to different parts of creation (vv39-41). The Apostle wants us to notice the diversity within God's creation. God makes men in one form and animals in another (v39). The heavenly bodies, such as the sun and moon, are different from anything on earth (v40). Even the sun, moon and stars differ although they are all celestial bodies (v41). In other words, if we take a moment to consider God's creation, we notice

that He creates many different kinds of bodies suited perfectly to fulfill their purpose. So it is with our bodies. Here on earth, these bodies serve their purpose, but they are not fit for eternity. So while these will be these same bodies which are raised, they will take on drastically new qualities. For instance, these bodies perish; glorified bodies are imperishable (v42). Paul considers our bodies at the time of one's death and then compares that body with the glorified body. Death reveals the lowly [dishonorable] state of our bodies, while the resurrection will radiate the glory of their transformation. Nothing reveals our physical weakness like dying and nothing will demonstrate the power of our newly transformed bodies like rising (v43). Commenting on the distinction between natural and spiritual bodies (v44a), Charles Hodge writes, *A natural body consists of flesh and blood; is susceptible of pain and decay; and needs air, food and rest. It is a mere animal body, adapted to the conditions of an earthly existence. What a spiritual body is, we know only from Paul's description, and from the manifestation of Christ in his glorified body.* If a natural body can exist, then by God's power, a spiritual body can exist as well. If God can design a body fit for earth, we should not doubt that He can easily transform that body making it fit for heaven (v44b).

2. OUR RELATIONSHIP TO ADAM AND JESUS HELPS EXPLAIN HOW THE DEAD ARE RAISED (15:45-49)

It's not only nature that teaches us God can create bodies perfectly suited for their present conditions, but Scripture teaches this lesson as well. Paul has already taught the Corinthians about what it means to be *in Adam* and *in Christ* (v22). He now picks that theme up once again. The first Adam was created with a body suited for earth (v47); the last Adam [the second man (v47)] is *of a far higher order* [Hodge]. So, all who are descended from Adam have bodies equipped for this life only. But Jesus *became a life-giving spirit*. That is to say, when God added a human nature to His divine nature, He intended to give eternal life. Eternal life requires a body suited for eternity. At His resurrection, Jesus was given a supernatural body and that same kind of body will be given to all who are *in Christ* (v45). But before we graduate to this supernatural body, we must first live in this natural state of existence (v46). Thus, it makes sense that Adam was created before Christ was born as a human (v47); the natural precedes the spiritual. The earthly existence precedes the heavenly existence (v48). We are like Adam before we are like Jesus. But just as we are like Adam, possessing a body fit for earth, so we will be like Jesus, possessing a body transformed for heaven (v49). Because we are vitally connected to Adam as the federal head of humanity, the death of our bodies is a certainty for us [apart from Jesus' return in our life time]. Therefore, if our bodies are to be raised to eternal life, then we must become vitally connected to Jesus through faith. This is why Paul exhorts us to *confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation (Romans 10:9-10).*

We will be like Jesus. God so loves His dear Son that He desires to multiply His image in us, billions and billions of us [See Romans 8:29-30, *29For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified*]. And now, God calls us to grow up into Christ. Ephesians 4:14-15, *14As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ.* As we hear the truth, we should grow up into more mature Christians who think and behave more and more like Jesus.

3. THIS RESURRECTION IS ESSENTIAL TO FULFILLING GOD'S PLAN OF REDEMPTION (15:50-57)

The bodily transformation Paul explains is necessary because *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable (v50)*. Heaven is our final destination, but we cannot get there in these bodies. These bodies are given for earth; a new body will be given for heaven. This bodily transformation is necessary for all believers, those who die and those who are alive at the Lord's return (v51). Paul now lays out some specifics of the transformation: it will be instantaneous, *in a portion of time so short as to be incapable of further division* [Hodge]. It will take place at the last trumpet. The idea is that the trumpet will be sounded to gather the people of God for this transformation, including both the dead and the living. The dead bodies will be raised and the living bodies will be transformed (v52). Again, Paul declares this to be essential to fulfill God's plan of redemption because redemption is not only about forgiving sins. It is about a new humanity formed in the very image of our resurrected Lord. Therefore, we must *put on the imperishable* as He did. We must be clothed in *immortality* just as He was. Death must be *swallowed up in victory (v54)* [Quotations from Isaiah 25:8 & Hosea 13:14].

In the presence of our Savior, as we stand there with redeemed bodies, we shall ask "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING (v55)?" Charles Hodge writes, *Death is addressed under the figure of an animal armed with a poisonous sting which pierces even to the soul. But in Christ, that sting is removed for the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (vv56-57)*. In other words, death is frightening because of sin. If there were no sin, there would be no death [Romans 5:12]. Additionally, we die as sinners who must face the righteous Judge. *If sin be pardoned, death is harmless. It can inflict no evil. It becomes a mere transition to a higher state* [Hodge]. But think of the power of sin over us if we have not been pardoned. Sin finds its power to condemn in the very Law of God. God has given commands and we have violated those commands; we have sinned. If there were no commands, there could be no violations, no sins. But God's commands are clear and when we ignore or transgress those commands, our sin has the power to certainly condemn us before the righteous Judge. *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (v57)*. Thanks be to God because He sent Jesus to perfectly obey the commands of God. Thanks be to God because He sent Jesus to die in the place of hopeless sinners who had violated the commands of God. Thanks be to God because He validated both the life and death of His Son by raising Him from the dead. Jesus is our victory.

CONCLUSION

God, in Christ, is forming a new humanity over which sin holds no power and death presents no fear. *58Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord*. Paul concludes this theological discussion with practical application. Our efforts in faithful obedience must continue without interruption because they will be finally rewarded at the resurrection of the righteous. Remember to whom Paul is writing. These are immature, struggling believers who Paul considers his *beloved brethren*. He fully realizes their need for repentance and growth in the Gospel. But notice what he encourages, steady growth in obedience. Their growth, our growth, no matter how much it is hindered by our own sin, is not in vain. It will be rewarded. And this reward will come at the resurrection of God's people. Jesus' resurrection teaches us that very thing.