

# I Believe

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.  
(Genesis 1:1 ESV)*

*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.  
(Hebrews 11:6 ESV)*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,  
that you may know that you have eternal life.  
(1 John 5:13 ESV)*

## **The Resurrection Of The Body**

**May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

**1 Corinthians 15:35-58**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bible to 1 Corinthians 15. On Easter Sunday, we considered the line:

On the third day he rose again from the dead

This morning, we are studying the line:

I believe in the resurrection of the body

Obviously, there's a great deal of overlap here. So, what happened? Is this a redundancy? Did the early church forget that they had already touched on the resurrection? What we will learn this morning is that this isn't a meaningless repetition – it is a necessary APPLICATION. The Apostle Paul uses this same approach in 1 Corinthians 15 – a chapter that scholars often refer to as “The Resurrection Chapter”. In the first half, Paul makes a case for the historicity and the necessity of the resurrection of JESUS. But then, in the second half of the chapter, he doesn't simply assume that the Corinthians will simply “connect the dots,” so he pivots from the resurrection of Jesus to the resurrection of ALL believers and explains how the two are inseparably connected.

Most of us have grown up in a culture that was birthed with Judeo-Christian values and ideas in its DNA. This is the water that we swim in. You might assume, therefore, that the resurrection of the body has always been common knowledge. But it most certainly was not. Not in Corinth. Not in the ancient near-eastern world of the early church. Not in most places around the world today. The doctrine of the resurrection of the body ran counter to the culture of the early church and, as we will see, it is becoming more and more counter-cultural in our own day and age.

So, what does it mean to believe in the resurrection of the body, and why does it matter? Look with me to 1 Corinthians 15:35-58. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today:

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?"<sup>36</sup> You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.<sup>37</sup> And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.<sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.<sup>39</sup> For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.<sup>40</sup> There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another.<sup>41</sup> There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

<sup>42</sup> So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable.<sup>43</sup> It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.<sup>44</sup> It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.<sup>45</sup> Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.<sup>46</sup> But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual.<sup>47</sup> The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.<sup>48</sup> As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.<sup>49</sup> Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

<sup>50</sup> I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.<sup>51</sup> Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,<sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.<sup>53</sup> For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.<sup>54</sup> When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

<sup>55</sup> "O death, where is your victory?  
O death, where is your sting?"

<sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.<sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>58</sup> Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:35-58 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

In this passage, Paul gives an introductory description of the nature, the timing and the implications of the resurrection of the body. But before we unpack all of that, I want to begin by identifying the objection that exists BEHIND Paul's letter and behind the authoring of this creed. I want to begin this morning by asking the question: Why was this doctrine opposed?

### **Why Was This Doctrine Opposed?**

In verse 36, Paul addresses the question that underlies this text:

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?"<sup>36</sup> You foolish person! (1 Corinthians 15:35-36a ESV)

Now, if this were a legitimate question from an inquiring believer, then Paul wouldn't respond with such sharp language. His tone suggests that he is answering someone like the fool of Proverbs or of Psalm 14. He's responding to a snarky, disbelieving line of questioning. The person asking these questions doesn't want answers. They just want to insult and belittle a doctrine that they think is ridiculous. But that begs the question: Why would someone oppose the doctrine of the resurrection of believers?

Strange as it might seem today, this doctrine was wildly offensive when it was first preached. By and large, the human body was looked upon with disdain in the early centuries in the ancient near east. This thinking infiltrated the church towards the end of the first century and was formalized through a heresy called Gnosticism. At its most basic level, Gnosticism held that the physical realm was inherently evil. The goal of the Gnostic, then, was to escape from all things physical

and to elevate the mind to focus on purely spiritual things. It was there – in the escape from and rejection of the physical – that true religion was found.

We continue to see this type of thinking in Eastern religions today. The goal of the Hindu is to lose oneself into perfect oneness with Brahman. The goal of the Buddhist is to lose oneself in the Void.

Simply put, the desire to escape from the distraction and the suffering of the physical world is the driving force behind modern Eastern religions and their New Age counterparts. You likely have more familiarity with these ideas than you realize. Not to be too nerdy, but these ideologies are on full display in, for example, Star Wars. How does a Jedi grow in his abilities? He loses himself and becomes one with the force. And what happens when a really enlightened Jedi dies? His body disappears and he is absorbed into the force.

There's nothing new under the sun. The heresy of Gnosticism – the idea that the physical and the spiritual are separate and that the physical is “bad” – is alive and well in our culture. For example, it is not uncommon to hear a person say, “I am a man trapped in a woman's body.” Our solution to that statement is to provide whatever hormones or surgery are required to transform that body. Why? Because we think like Gnostics. The soul is authoritative. The body is not. The body is just a cage made of meat that the soul is stuck in. Our culture increasingly thinks this way.

But as Christians, we can't go down that road. We believe in the inherent goodness of the body. We believe that God made us to live as physical beings. We believe that – aside from the effects of sin – the physical world is GOOD because God made it to be good.

We see this all over the creed. It is overwhelmingly affirming of the physical world. It affirms God as the Maker of heaven and earth thus declaring the goodness of the material realm. It reminds us that Jesus resided in the womb of a woman and that he was born in a physical body. He lived, he suffered and then he died in that physical body. But when his work was complete, rather than discarding his body, the God of the Universe clothed Himself again in human flesh – flesh that he will wear for all eternity! And when the trumpet sounds, we will all put on our resurrection bodies too. As Ben Myers notes:

From start to finish, the creed affirms the value of the material world.<sup>1</sup>

This doctrine was opposed – these scoffers mocked Paul’s teaching – because not everyone affirms the goodness of the physical world. That was true in Paul’s day, and it is becoming increasingly true in our own day.

But Paul takes their mocking question: “With what kind of body do they come?” and he goes ahead and answers it. Because motives aside, that is an excellent question! So, let’s ask it ourselves:

### **What Will The Resurrection Body Be Like?**

I’m glad that these scoffers asked this question because, apart from this passage, there is very little word count in the Bible devoted to describing our resurrected bodies. We know that the resurrection is coming, but we don’t know as much as we might prefer to know about what our resurrected bodies are going to look like. Perhaps this is because God knew that we would be overwhelmed and distracted by these details. C.S. Lewis famously wrote:

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare.<sup>2</sup>

Lewis is saying here that our eternal, resurrected bodies are going to be so glorious that, were we to see each other in that state, we would be tempted to worship one another! Perhaps it is for this reason that Paul speaks so vaguely and broadly in this passage as he describes the nature of our resurrected bodies. He tells us first of all that they will be:

#### **1. Similar to our current bodies**

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Myers, *The Apostle's Creed - A Guide to the Ancient Catechism* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 119.

<sup>2</sup> As quoted in <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/282593-it-is-a-serious-thing-to-live-in-a-society> Accessed May 25, 2021.

This is the message that Paul is conveying with his seed imagery. When an apple seed is placed into the ground, it eventually emerges from the ground as an apple tree. It is of the SAME kind.

Apple seeds don't produce skyscrapers and watermelon seeds don't sprout porcupines. God is a God of order, and in the same way that He made each and every animal of its own kind in the days of creation, so too will he remake us in our own kind at the final resurrection. When you plant my body into the ground, I won't return as a bear or a bumble bee. I will return as a man.

When Jesus appeared to his disciples following his resurrection, they didn't recognize him at first glance, but they did eventually. Perhaps they were initially in shock or perhaps his appearance was slightly altered – but it didn't take them long to discern his identity. For example, when Jesus appeared to the disciples while they were fishing the text says:

Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" **They knew it was the Lord.** (John 21:12 ESV)

They knew. The seed that went into the ground resembled that which burst forth from the ground. Our resurrection bodies will be similar to our current bodies. And yet, they will also be gloriously different!

## **2. Gloriously different!**

If you had never seen a tree before and I were to give you an apple seed, you wouldn't in a million years guess what that seed would become. In the same way, Paul writes in verse 42:

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. <sup>43</sup> It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. <sup>44</sup> It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. (1 Corinthians 15:42-44a ESV)

He goes on to say:

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51 ESV)

I am so glad that my resurrected body is going to be different. I'm thankful for this body, but I'm only 31 and it's already breaking down. I couldn't do a million years in this body... I don't know if I'll be able to do 80! But thankfully, our resurrected bodies will be gloriously different! They will be imperishable! Powerful! Spiritual! Immortal! These are the words that Paul uses to describe the physical bodies that are in store for us. Similar, but gloriously different! Paul borrows language and imagery here from the creation account of Genesis 1 and 2 and, when you stop to consider why, it makes a great deal of sense. One commentator notes:

The passage as a whole reflects considerable reflection on Genesis 1-2, presupposing the idea that in protology (the study of creation's beginning) we find the keys to eschatology. It is understood that in many ways the last things will be like the first things, only even better.<sup>3</sup>

If you want to understand what the end will be like when God has finally done away with sin and death and we are living in His uninterrupted presence, then it only makes sense that you would take a look back at the garden before sin and death were ever introduced into the scene and we were living in God's uninterrupted presence. God is restoring that which has been destroyed. His plan of redemption is to bring us back into the garden where we belong. Whenever you are grieving a lost loved one and you want to try to wrap your mind around what the new heavens and the new earth will be like, turn back to Genesis 1 and 2. It's going to be a lot like that, but better.

And WE are going to be a lot like that. But better. We were born in Adam, and we resemble him. But in the resurrection, we will be reborn in the new Adam – that is, Jesus Christ – and we will resemble him in his glory.

Christ, the eschatological Adam, is the founder of a new and better humanity.<sup>4</sup>

Similar, but gloriously different! New. Better. Hallelujah!

But when will this take place? When will we receive our resurrected bodies?

### **When Will We Receive Our Resurrected Bodies?**

<sup>3</sup> Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, [Pillar New Testament Commentary](#). Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 799.

<sup>4</sup> Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, [Pillar New Testament Commentary](#). Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 809.

You've heard me say this before, but it seems to me that Christians are fuzzy on this particular point. It is all too common to hear it said from the pulpit at funerals that little Timmy is currently doing cartwheels with the Apostle Paul in the new heavens and the new earth. And again, those sentiments aren't malicious or heretical – but they are inaccurate and therefore unhelpful.

If your deceased loved one was a believer, then the Bible tells us that they are currently with Christ but apart from their physical body. They are in what theologians refer to as “the intermediate state.” Their spirit is around the throne and they, like you, are longing for the final resurrection of the body.

So, when will that be?

The Apostle Paul writes:

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, <sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. **For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.** (1 Corinthians 15:51-52 ESV)

Paul further clarifies in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, where he writes:

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 ESV)

At the return of Christ – at the trumpet sound when he returns to judge the quick and the dead – we will receive our resurrected bodies. First, those Christians who have died before us will rise. Then, we will be changed into our eternal, resurrected bodies. Then, together with the whole communion of saints – with the holy catholic church – with all of our brothers and sisters who passed on before us – TOGETHER we will ascend to the heavens to escort our King to the earth where the final judgement will take place. When we receive our resurrected bodies, it will be the final blow to our eternal enemy. As Paul describes it:

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

<sup>55</sup>“O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:54-55 ESV)

The defeat of sin and death is already guaranteed, but when the bodies of the children of God are released from the grave, the victory will be consummated, and the victory parade will begin!

Let’s indulge our imaginations for a moment: There is a day coming – perhaps tomorrow, or perhaps 1,000 years from now – when the clouds will be rolled back like a scroll. Every person in every corner of the world will stop and stare. Then a sound like a trumpet will ring out and fill the atmosphere. At that point, glorious, resurrected bodies of every deceased believer who has ever lived will appear. The sight of them will leave us dumbfounded and trembling with holy fear. We’ll see Daniel and David along with Henry Ouderkirk and Bob Langman – all of them majestic and unlike anything we could have imagined. But we won’t stand and marvel for long, because in an instant we too will be changed. We will become eternal, immortal, powerful, glorious versions of ourselves. And then we will arise – just like Christ rose in the final ascension. We will instinctively move toward that sound like a trumpet. Like mother’s voice calling her children home, we will follow that sound. And then, we will see him.

The resurrected Christ will be unlike anything that we could have imagined. We will see the Lion of Judah, seated on his warhorse clothed in a robe dipped in blood. We will see the nail pierced hands of the Lamb of God who was slain for the sins of the world. He will perfectly pair strength and meekness – splendour and humility. We will see the King of Kings who embodies holy love, and we will laugh at how horribly deficient and inadequate the best sermons preached by the best preachers were for preparing us for this sight.

Then we will accompany our King as he returns once and for all to put an end to sin and death. Following the final judgement, he will create a new heaven and a new earth, and we will live there with him in our glorified, resurrected bodies forever.

That is what we are saying when we proclaim the resurrection of the body.

But as we conclude, I want to think through some implications of this doctrine. Eschatology – study of the end times – is not simply an academic exercise. What we believe about the end must necessarily change the way that we live today. So, how should this doctrine change the way that we live today? What are the implications of the resurrection of the body?

## Implications

First of all:

### 1. It should change the way that we talk about and treat our bodies

As I mentioned off the top, this creed was originally proclaimed in a culture that believed that the physical body was something to be escaped. Our own culture is headed in the same direction at a speed that is dramatically increasing with each passing day.

Therefore, we have an opportunity to present a radical alternative to the narrative that is being pumped out all around us.

Christian, your body was given to you by God. He didn't make a mistake. Now, unfortunately there is no part of creation that is not currently tainted by sin, and that holds true for your body. It gets fat and flabby when you don't exercise. It grows weak when you don't sleep or eat well. It develops tumours and sores and all other sorts of deformities as a result of the curse. Your body is not now what it will be in eternity.

But, in spite of all of its deficiencies, your body is not something that you should despise. It is God's gift to you. This is an eternal gift. And, because you are in Christ, the Holy Spirit is dwelling in you. Have you ever thought about that? If God Himself is willing to reside in your body and to call it His temple, then you'd better think twice about what you say about that temple.

Parents, your kids are going to grow up in a world that is very different than the world that you grew up in. Cutting and other forms of self-harm are on the rise. More and more children are choosing to pursue hormone therapy because they feel like they are trapped in the wrong body.

This movement only furthers the unrealistic and destructive idea that we can find happiness and fulfillment if only we can make our bodies look a certain way. Combine this with the body image messaging of magazines and movies and the trauma that our young girls are facing with the images that are portrayed in pornography and we have a mental health BOMB that is about to explode in our culture.

This is a multifaceted and complex issue, and it requires a multifaceted answer, but here's a start. Let's make sure that we as the church talk about bodies differently. Our kids are drinking from a fire hydrant of wrong all day long. So, let's be clear and consistent with the truth.

Christian: Your body is good. Your body is a temple of the living God. Your body is not a mistake. Your body is God's gift to you. It is not something to be escaped from or ashamed of. Your body is not yet what it will forever be, and sometimes we feel the brokenness of these bodies in really painful ways, but one day God is going to glorify your body! In that glorified body, you are going to dwell in the new heavens and the new earth with God and all of His people forever.

If we believe in the resurrection of the body, then we need to reclaim a Biblical doctrine of the body and we need to teach it clearly and frequently. Second:

## **2. It should inform the way that we witness with our bodies**

Christian funerals have historically been centered around the burial of the body of the deceased. This wasn't by accident. The practice of burial is meant to teach symbolically what the Apostle Paul is explaining here in 1 Corinthians 15. While other cultures adopted cremation as a way of saying that the body was no more, Christians planted the body – like a seed – as a way of proclaiming that God's plan for the body was not yet complete.

Now, hear this disclaimer and hear it loud and clear: I am NOT saying that cremation is inherently wrong. Whether your loved one was buried, or cremated, or lost at sea, if they are in Christ then they will be raised in their resurrected body on that final day! Hallelujah!

So, why then would I include this point if the burial doesn't affect the future of our loved one?

I include this point because symbols instruct, and the imagery of the burial is a powerful teaching tool. It teaches us. It teaches our kids. It teaches our neighbours. And the LESSON of the burial is the lesson of 1 Corinthians 15. When we bury the body of our loved one, we are preaching. So, let's preach that sermon loud and clear! "We are burying this body in the ground because we believe that God is not done with it. We will see this brother again, and we will see him in this BODY again. So, we're going to press this seed into the ground, and we're going to cover it with soil, but it is going to burst out of this plot when that final trumpet sounds, and our brother will live in his glorious, resurrected body forever!"

The ceremony teaches. The symbolism matters. Let's use these bodies to witness to the world.

The third and final implication of this doctrine is that:

### **3. It should empower and embolden us in our weakness**

That's where our text this morning lands. Look at verse 58:

<sup>58</sup> Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:58 ESV)

"Death has been defeated! The grave has no hold on you! You're going to rise up at the sound of the final trumpet in a glorious, imperishable resurrected body! Therefore, be steadfast!

Immovable! Abounding in the work of the Lord! Trusting that your labour is never in vain!"

Good theology matters. If you don't know how this story ends, then you are going to fold at the first sign of resistance. If you think that heaven is going to be some boring, joyless existence where you will float around as a spirit strumming a harp, then you are going to want to ring as much fun out of this earthly life as you can.

But if you believe in the resurrection of the body – if you believe that the grave has no power to hold you down and that you are going to live in a glorified body enjoying God and His good creation forever – then you are going to press forward even when the gates of hell stand against you. I've read this quote to you before, but it's so nice it's worth reading twice. Athanasius said:

When you see children playing with a lion, don't you know that the lion must be either dead or completely powerless? In the same way... when you see Christ's believers playing with death and despising it, there can be no doubt that death has been destroyed by Christ and that its corruption has been dissolved and brought to an end.<sup>5</sup>

When we bury our loved ones in the ground and sing about how they are going to rise up out of the grave we declare a message to the watching world. Death is a powerless lion. Now, please don't overhear that. Death is still our enemy. Jesus wept and so too do we. Death robs us of our loved ones and makes us angry. Death IS our enemy. But when Jesus walked out of that tomb, he proved that death's power over us is coming to an end.

He talks a big talk, but we know how this story ends. We're not done with this body. We're planting it right here, and from this plot it will arise. This isn't the end. It's the beginning. This grave won't hold this body down.

I mentioned our brother Bob earlier in this sermon. Truth be told, I was thinking of him as I sat in my office and wrote. Bob would readily confess that his earthly body was more of a hindrance than it was a help over this past year. But that weakness didn't keep him from prayer. Our brother was frail, but the gates of hell trembled when he bowed his head and called upon the name of the Lord. He was steadfast; immovable; abounding in the work of the Lord; and his labour was not in vain.

We pressed the seed of his body into the ground on Friday afternoon. And when the trumpet sounds, we're going to see our brother again. He'll be standing in a glorified resurrection body along with every other believer who has gone before us. Do you believe that day is coming? I do.

I believe in the resurrection of the body.

Let's pray together.

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<sup>5</sup> Athanasius as quoted by Ben Myers, *The Apostle's Creed - A Guide to the Ancient Catechism* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 83-84.