

---

# Will Christians Rise from the Dead?

1 Corinthians 15:35-50<sup>24</sup>

*Russ Kennedy*

So since it is settled that Jesus rose from the dead in a real, bodily resurrection, then it is also settled that God's people will also be raised bodily. But the skeptics of Paul's day and of our day raise a question. That question comes because we are only familiar with this body, this world, this material. Since it is of the earth, cursed and subject to decline, decay and death, it is hard to imagine something different.

But Paul is confident and clear about our own resurrection from the dead.

## **The Nature of our Resurrection (v.35-49)**

Those who questioned the resurrection were troubled by what would be the exact makeup of the resurrection body.

### ***The Primary Objection (v. 35)***

<sup>35</sup> But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?"

Here is the objection. The 'someone' here is certainly someone in the church at Corinth. This may be a question arising from honest and earnest inquiry. It is a process or product question. It is a "Help us understand what that future resurrected body will actually be like..." Or, as Paul's response seems to indicate, it is a question arising from skepticism. It is a "How is this possible..." kind of question. The assumption is that Paul cannot answer the question in a reasonable way and thus the resurrection of God's people remains at least an open question if not a settled impossibility.

### ***The Principle Illustrated (v. 36-41)***

Paul's response is sharp and striking...

<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,

---

<sup>24</sup> Unless otherwise designated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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.

Paul responds to the question by calling the questioner a foolish person. Then he shows that the person questioning the nature of the resurrection body is not a careful and theological observer of nature. Here is an important principle. Many underlying principles and processes in nature were designed and created by God to illustrate hidden, deeper spiritual principles. We are obligated in some way to observe and learn these things.

The relationship between the natural and resurrected bodies is illustrated. God has designed all the created order choosing what is best for each thing. He has designed the process by which living things replicate, particularly those which develop from seeds. In this design, everywhere we look, we find that there are all different kinds of "flesh". Humans, animals, birds and fish all have different kinds of bodies, suited to their environment. Even in the heavens we understand that there is a different kind of brightness or glory. The stars, the moon and sun shine with different lights.

### ***The Contrasts Developed (v. 42-49)***

<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.

Our resurrection is presented in a series of contrasts between the earthly, natural body and the spiritual, glorified body. The basic principle is taken from agriculture. Seeds are placed in the ground. The outer shell dies. When it does the inner part is released to begin to grow. As it grows it becomes the plant. The seed is different from the plant. Yet, while it is different it is still the same kind or species of plant. You do not put flower seeds in the ground and expect to get maple trees. Maple twirly bird seeds land in my yard and with sun and rain, they try to grow at maple sprigs. So the human body is like the seed. It must die and go into the ground. When it comes up as a resurrection body, it is different but the same. We tend to think of our earthly body is full of greatness and wonder. But let me tell you, this is but a dying seed destined for the ground. In the resurrection the body we will have will be just as amazingly more wonderful as the maple tree is to the little winged seed it sheds.

Once again, the old/new dynamic drives Paul's understanding. The first Adam and the second Adam is one way, among many) that Paul uses to refer to the underlying structure of God's plans and purposes. The old Adam is first earthly, the world in sin,

under law and cursed. The new Adam is Jesus Christ who is from heaven is making all things new. He has brought the regenerative and transforming power of the new age, the new heavens and the new earth through his own death and resurrection. In body of the old, he died and went down into the grave. But he rose again out of the dead and the ground – his glorified body is radically different and yet still human, still intrinsically Jesus'. So in our first body we are image Adam's image, earthly, dust, of this age and this fallen world. In our resurrected body we will be in Jesus' pattern, heavenly, of the new age and the new creation.

So, there may be objections to the doctrine of the resurrection. In this paragraph he shows that in the resurrection, Christians will receive a body, but one that is glorified and therefore different. It will be a body, but different in its glory, just as the sun and moon are still heavenly bodies but different in their glory. It will be us, still the same, but radically new and different. What makes it different is that now we are shaped most by our humanity. Then, we will be shaped most by the heavenly.

### **The Triumph of our Resurrection (v.50-57)**

Many at Corinth had embraced a kind of triumphalistic theology. They claimed that all that God will do in eternity He has done and they have experienced now. This is what many call, "an over-realized eschatology." It effectively denies the already/not yet matrix in which we now live.

<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.

### ***The Necessity of our Resurrection (v. 50)***

The resurrection is necessary because perishable, flesh and blood cannot inherit the imperishable kingdom. In other seed has to die and be transformed to be a plant. The body of this world, this dust, this age *has* to be transformed. But what about those who do not die? What about those whose bodies do not go down into the ground in death? If we have not yet received our glorified bodies, how will the glorified body come to those who do not go through death, and thus a resurrection? This is a good question that Paul answers next.

### ***The Moment of our Transformation (v. 51-53)***

As Paul does elsewhere, he locates this transformation at the same moment. Both the dead and those who remain alive will receive their glorified bodies *together*. So Paul; reminds us of the mystery, the amazing truth hinted at in the Old Testament but now made clear in the New Testament.

When it will happen? It will happen when Jesus returns at the end of days. After the period of great distress and tribulation, Jesus will return from heaven with His saints and angels. This will be at the last trumpet, referring to the same event that Paul and later, Matthew, refer to.

For you Bible students, remember that Paul wrote 1-2 Thessalonians and 1-2 Corinthians *before* Matthew wrote his gospel. So Paul's teaching on this evokes Jesus' teaching which Matthew wrote down. So it is likely that Matthew and Mark, in putting down Jesus' words all those years before, also are aware of what Paul has been teaching. So while Paul may be alluding to Jesus' teaching, he is not quoting Matthew and Mark. But listen to these three texts together.

First, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 written around 50-51 AD.

<sup>13</sup> But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. <sup>15</sup> For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Then, 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 written around 55 AD.

<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.

And finally, Matthew 24:29-31 written around the late 50's or early 60's AD.

<sup>29</sup> "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>30</sup> Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. <sup>31</sup> And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

And around the same time, Mark 13:24-27.

<sup>24</sup> “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, <sup>25</sup> and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. <sup>26</sup> And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup> And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

This event is sometimes called, “the rapture”. Since that term is most often associated with pretribulation premillennial eschatology, I would prefer to refer to it as the great gathering, the catching up of God’s people.

What will happen? We shall be changed. All of God’s children will be changed. The dead will rise in glorified bodies. The living will be transformed instantly. We will be changed. That of us which is corruptible will fall away. That which is incorruptible will become ours. We will have our new creation bodies.

This will happen because it is necessary for the old creation to be put off and the new creation to be put on. What we have been doing in our walk with God and His people, God now does for us in outer man. The old is shed. The new is put on. And we are changed because we must be.

### ***The Fulfillment of our Expectations (v. 54-56)***

This is an argument for the already/not yet structure of the New Creation.

. <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:

Paul quotes from Isaiah to show that this great moment of transforming resurrection is the fulfillment of Old Covenant and New Covenant hopes in **Isaiah 25:6-9**

<sup>6</sup> On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.

<sup>7</sup> And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations.

<sup>8</sup> He will swallow up death forever;  
and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces,  
and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.

<sup>9</sup> It will be said on that day,  
“Behold, this is our God;  
we have waited for him, that he might save us.  
This is the LORD;  
we have waited for him;  
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

Here is the mountain, the hidden new creation that will be unveiled on that day. What day? The day death is swallowed up in victory. The day when all tears will be wiped away (Revelation 7:17). The covering, the reproach, the old will be taken away. This is the day we hoped for. This is the day we waited for. Our God, our Lord, will save us. He will finish what was begun at the resurrection. He will bring to fulfillment what was begun in our regeneration. On that final day the resurrection life of the new creation, the life of Jesus by the Spirit, will utterly consume, swallow up and destroy death. So until that day comes, let us wait. Let us rejoice. Let us long for it.

### ***The Person of our Exultation (v. 56-57)***

<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.

So death is the stinger of the scorpion of sin. Sin's authority and enabling is law.

God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, **gives us** the victory. Three assertions are being made:

The Person who is giving the victory. It is God the Father who graces us with the victory over death, sin and the law. How did He give it to us?

The Person through whom the victory was obtained was the Lord Jesus Christ. He overcame death, sin and law so as to be the means by which the Father gives us the victory. He is our victory. His victory we share in.

The people who receive the victory are all the true people of God. God has given "us" the victory. This is an interesting inclusion of himself, a little unusual for Paul. Those who are with Paul in belief and practice are participants in this great, Christ-wrought, God-graced victory.

How will this all happen? Because there is coming a day when Jesus comes and we will be changed. What is passing and perishable will become clothed in what is permanent and lasting. This will come because God will bring the victory through Jesus Christ. But not yet...

### **The Motivation by Our Resurrection (v.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.

Paul's labor and our toil in the Lord's work are not empty or useless because the resurrection reminds us that what we are doing now is for our future hope. We will not be discouraged and disheartened because the reward and the fullness of even Christ's Kingdom and glory is beyond our death-line.

How do we know that our toil is not in vain?

***We have not believed in vain******(v.2)***

The surety of the resurrection assures us that we have not banked our hope in the future in empty promises. We will hold fast to the gospel in the midst of great difficulty and grave dangers because our trust in Jesus is not empty or useless.

***God's grace in us was not in vain******(v.10)***

We are assured that our labor in the Lord is not useless or empty because it is enabled and strengthened and sustained by sufficient grace. The grace of God is not empty or useless in us. We know that God is at work in us because we are at work.

***Our faith and doctrine is not in vain******(v.14)***

We are assured that our labor in the Lord is not useless or empty because what we believe is simply true. What we believe and preach is empty and useless *if it isn't so*. But it is. And since it is true that Jesus is alive, then my labor for Him is immediately and ultimately fulfilling and useful.

But our labor will be empty and useless if it is not "in the Lord." A great deal of what was happening in the church at Corinth was empty and useless because it was being done in the flesh. We cannot wave the magic wand of this text over our sinful hats and pull out spiritual ministry.

**The Responsibilities because of our Resurrection (v.58)**

So what must we do? How do we take this wonderful truth and turn it into lasting and useful ministry.

***Be Steadfast***

Isaiah 26:3-4 "The **steadfast** of mind Thou wilt keep in perfect peace, Because he trusts in Thee. <sup>4</sup>"Trust in the Lord forever, For in God the Lord, we have an everlasting Rock."

Colossians 1:23 "if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and **steadfast**, and not moved away from *the hope of the gospel* that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister."

Hebrews 6:19 – "This *hope we have as an anchor* of the soul, a hope both sure and **steadfast** and one which enters within the veil..."

We are to have a fixed and unchanging constancy or loyalty in our labor of serving Christ. We must not be easily shaken and persuaded away from the gospel and truth.

***Be Immovable***

The word does not mean to be stubborn and totally resistant to change. We must allow nothing to move us from the gospel and our labor in the Lord. The church at Corinth

was in a mighty struggle for truth in doctrine and practice. Paul wanted have unchanging courage and constancy for Christ.

### ***Give yourself totally to the Ministry***

The Bible calls this “constantly abounding.” There must be a total commitment to the labor and toil. Paul had exhibited it in the face of almost unbelievable suffering. And this church frankly had little to commend it. Yet, Paul calls for an total involvement in unremitting toil and labor for the gospel in their context.

Why and how? Because the resurrection has ushered in the unfolding age of God’s Kingdom. Jesus has died and was raised and is now ascended into heaven awaiting the day of ultimate glory and victory. So we are laboring in the *now, the already* for the sake of the *not yet*.

---

## **Reflect and Respond**

The applications to us are obvious. All of you who name the name of Christ, this is God’s Word to each of you and all of you:

Thanks be to God,  
    who gives us the victory  
        through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brethren,  
    Stand firm for the gospel;  
        Be immovable away from the gospel;

Always give yourself totally to the work of the Lord in the gospel,

Because you KNOW  
    that your toil is not useless or empty  
        [if it is] in the Lord.