

Heaven: The Life Beyond

“Keep seeking the things above where Christ is seated...Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth” – Paul 60 A.D.

Part 3 *“The Resurrection of the Dead”*

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15.1-41

Subject: This is the second longest and passage in the Bible of a single doctrinal subject (The Second Coming Matthew 24-25 being the longest). It is the most detailed of subjects essential to the Christian faith. No other writer went into more detail to explain a truth. Therefore, we have before us an accurate account of each facet of the resurrected body. The information in this chapter is carefully laid out in specifics of this new and glorious body. Here is a brief overview of what this passage tells us about our new and heavenly body.

1. The new body cannot be compared to our earthly body (1 Corinthians 15.48-49). The contrast between the raw appearance of a seed (human body) and the flower (eternal body) that is produced after the seed dies reveals to us the glory of the heavenly body.
2. Our new body will be profoundly different from our earthly body (1 Corinthians 15.39-42). Just as there is a difference between a human body and an animal so also will there be a radical difference between our earthly body and our heavenly body.
3. The new body will be without pain, sin or any weakness. It will be a body of power (1 Corinthians 15.42-43).
4. The new body will be like unto Christ’s glorified heavenly body (1 Corinthians 15.45-49). Just as all humans took on the same form of Adam’s body, so all believers will take the same form of Christ’s resurrected body.

This chapter was written because some in the church at Corinth said that there would not be a physical bodily resurrection. “How do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (15.12). This denial of the resurrection prompted Paul to write in detail and refute the error. In addition, Paul answered two important questions (15.35). The first is “how are the dead raised”? The second is “what kind of body will we have”? Paul previously taught the subject of the resurrection to the church when he was with them for two years. There are many references throughout both letters that indicate that they were familiar with this essential doctrine (1 Corinthians 2.9-10; 3.15; 4.20; 5.5; 6.3, 9-10; 9.25; 13.12). Paul began this chapter with a forceful declaration of the saving power of the Gospel. Paul preached it and they received it. He reminded them also that true saving faith in the Word is not in vain (15.1-2).

Substance:

1. The Centrality of Christ’s Resurrection: 15.1-11

A. The Essentials of the Gospel message: 15.2-5

There is no other way to have eternal life. “By this gospel you are saved” (15.2a). This message was divinely given to Paul and “passed on to as first importance” (15.3). Here are the four succinct statements:

- 1) Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture (Isaiah 53).
- 2) Christ was buried. This signified the actual human physical death of Christ (15.4a).
- 3) Christ was raised from the dead on the third day according to the Scripture (Luke 24.25-27).
- 4) Christ appeared alive to many witnesses totaling more than five hundred including Paul (5-11).

B. The foundational hope for our resurrection is that Christ rose from the dead. “If Christ has not been raised...your faith also is vain” (15.14). Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die” (John 11.25-26). And again Jesus said, “Because I live you shall live also” (John 14.19).

2. The Consequences of Denying Christ’s Resurrection: 15.12-19

To deny our future resurrection is to deny Christ’s bodily resurrection. The implications are clear. If Christ’s resurrection is denied then the whole Christian faith collapses.

A. Some, but not all, denied the resurrection in the church at Corinth. This is the reason for such a long explanation of the resurrection.

B. The truth of Christ’s resurrection cannot be separated from our future resurrection (15.13-15). “He did not raise (Christ) if in fact the dead are not raised.” Paul used the reverse argument to make his point even stronger. He stated if our future resurrection is not true then there is no truth to Christ’s resurrection. The Corinthians got the point since they agreed that Christ had been raised from the dead. It was the future resurrection of believers that some had doubted.

C. Paul assessed the entire Christian life and community of believers. Our reason for believing is our future hope and assurance of eternal life with Christ. The present life and our future life cannot be separated. “If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied” (15.16-18; ref. 19).

3. The Liberating Comfort of The Resurrection: 15.20-28

- A. The harvest illustration: Christ was a type the harvest of the first fruit (Exodus 34.22). His resurrection was the first and all believers who die will follow Him in the resurrection (15.20). “But each in his own order; Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at his coming” (15.23).
- B. The Garden of Eden illustration: Paul took the Corinthians back to the Garden of Eden. The consequences of Adam’s sin and disobedience are remedied by the righteousness and obedience of Christ (Romans 5.18-19). Adam brought death and Christ brought life (15.21-22; 45-49).
- C. We can be greatly comforted when we understand God’s purpose. Christ will present to the Father the Kingdom of God (15.24). “Then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign” (15.24-25a). The Father’s gift to His Son is the Bride, the Church (Genesis 24.4; John 6.37; Ephesians 27). The gift from the Son to the Father is the Kingdom of God “so that God may be all in all” (15.28). God is the unchallenged Ruler—The Sovereign of the whole universe (Romans 11.36; Ephesians 1.23; Colossians 3.11). The phrase “all in all” means that all things are under the sole authority of the resurrected Christ. His purpose and plan of redemption is completed and all enemies are subdued.

4. The Characteristics of the Resurrected Body—Two Questions Answered: 15:29-49

The “baptism for the dead” theory: What was the baptism for the dead? Some would suggest that it referred to the baptism of the spiritual dead after they came to Christ. This is an unlikely interpretation. This is a passage of presenting arguments for the resurrection. In the church there were those who believed that living believers could be baptized for their family members who had already died. In fact, the baptisms for the dead were common. Paul was not in any way commending this practice, nor did he teach the practice. He used this example only to make his point that if some did not believe in the resurrection of believers then why were they baptizing for the dead?

- A. The two questions are answered in reverse order. First, Paul will address the kind of body we will have (15.36-49). The second question of how the dead are raised is answered in final verses of this chapter (50-50-58).
- B. In the next few verses a very simple explanation about the kind of body that awaits us is laid out. The uncomplicated truth about our new body is in many ways it will be like our human body except it will be greater, better and in every way perfect!
- C. “You fool” is Paul’s way of capturing the attention of the resurrection critics. Did he not teach them about the resurrection while he was with them for two years? Have they descended back into Greek philosophy? Are they that spiritually uneducated?
- D. Paul’s answer to question two: what kind of body will we have?
- 1) The analogy of plant life (15.37-38): Transformation in plant life takes place when the seed dies and is buried. Germination or transformation turns something that is dead into something alive, a new creation unlike the features of the seed. The buried seed and the new plant are distinctively different in their appearance. The one comes out of the other, only better! “But God gives it a body just as He wished and to each of the seeds a body of its own.”
 - 2) The analogy of flesh (15.39): The complexity of human flesh differs from animal flesh. The key point here is that just as there are differing types of flesh on earth among God’s creation, so there will be a difference between our human body and our spiritual body. Simply put, not all flesh is the same. So our heavenly body will be quite different from our human body while at the same time retaining many of our earthly characteristics (Luke 24.13-27).
 - 3) The analogy of the heavenly bodies and their splendor (15.40-41): Just as the types of flesh on earth are different so also are the types of celestial or heavenly bodies. The sun, moon and stars are distinguished from each other by their splendor and brilliance. The sun has its splendor in day, while the moon has a different beauty at night. The stars shine with a certain radiance and magnificence. Therefore, in the resurrection, the body is transformed from one earthly beauty into a heavenly elegance. The heavenly far surpasses the earthly.