

1 Corinthians 15 (Part 4): 35-58 • The Best Is Yet To Come

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1 Corinthians chapter 15. We've been talking about the resurrection. I don't know how much you think about the resurrection. I don't know how much it dominates your thoughts. It was a big deal to the New Testament writers. They thought and talked about the resurrection of the dead a lot. It was just really a big part of what they wrote about and thought about and talked about.

I don't think we think about it as much today. I really don't. I think we're so geared and focused on the physical reality of our present life that we're just fixated and even obsessed with our physical bodies. You think? I mean, the amount of money we spend on them, the surgical procedures we will submit to in order to keep looking younger, I don't think it's working, you guys; I really don't. I think we're looking scary is what's happening. You look at people that have had plastic surgery, it's like, huh, hope you didn't pay much for that. But it's just a fixation on these physical bodies and so forth.

And yet, you can see, you can understand from reading the New Testament that the biblical writers were not fixated upon their present physical bodies. They were not fixated on the things that happened to their current physical bodies and their problems and challenges. Not that they didn't feel pain or experience difficulty. They certainly did, but Paul would say things like, I am convinced that our present sufferings are not even worth comparing to the glory that awaits us. What glory is he talking about? He's talking about the glory of what God is going to do by giving us new bodies one day. Wow. Yeah, pretty amazing.

Well, anyway, last time we studied in 1 Corinthians 15, we talked about the importance of the resurrection because many people in the Corinthian church were expressing their unbelief as it related to any resurrection. And now, Paul is going to talk in this latter part of chapter 15, and we're going to be picking it up in verse 35 with the nature of the resurrection—and by nature we mean that which describes or defines the resurrection, and makes it a little more understandable to us.

And so, anyway, we better pray.

Jesus, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for speaking to us. Thank You for giving wisdom to us. Guide us, we pray through all that we learn here today and help us to apply it to our lives in Jesus' name, amen.

Verse 35:

“But someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?’” (You'll notice a couple of different questions there, and Paul responds in verse 36 to say:) ³⁶ You foolish person!” (ESV)

In the Greek, it's even a little bit stronger than that; it's more like fool. But this is an interesting—only Paul can get away with that—this is an interesting sort of a word that you would use to address someone who should know better. Paul had lived for quite a while among the Corinthian people. While he was there, he no doubt talked about these things at some length, and they should have learned; they should have grown. And there are a lot of people in the body of Christ who should have learned, who should have grown, who should have understood by now.

And so, the word fool is not meant to be as derogatory as you might otherwise think. It's like, why are you ignorant of this? You should know this stuff. He goes on to use a very basic illustration to try to describe the resurrection, and he uses seeds and plants. He says here in verse 36, after calling the person a fool, he says:

“What you sow (and that means to plant in the ground) does not come to life (he says) unless it dies.”

He's referring to how a seed goes into the ground, and he says, unless something takes place—and he refers to it as death. I'll explain why—but otherwise, if that doesn't happen, what is supposed to come from that seed will never take place.

Now, technically speaking, you and I know, and I think Paul knew, too that a seed doesn't literally die when you put it into the ground. He's using that term to describe the process whereby a seed has to step aside so that the plant can then come forth, because we know that the seed begins to germinate and sprout, and then up comes the plant or tree or stock, whatever has been planted. And so, in a sense, that seed has to step to one side so that whatever is going to grow can grow.

You see, that's what Paul is using there for death; and the point here, of course, is that our resurrection bodies, it's a similar sort of a situation. Death must take place— unless the Lord comes first; we'll get to that— so that we might, our bodies might step aside, if you will, and that the resurrection body would be able to emerge.

And then he makes the next point in verse 37; look with me there in your Bible. He says:

“And what you sow is not the (actual) body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain (maybe it's a flower or something).³⁸ But God gives it a body (in other words, what comes from the seed) as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.”

Now, what Paul's talking about here is the miracle of growing plants and trees and crops. I've never really gotten into it, but I can get how cool it is to put seeds in the ground and have them— you water them and put them in the sun or something, and all of a sudden, something comes out of that. I mean, that's pretty cool; and what's interesting is that what comes out doesn't look anything like what you put in usually, anyway.

Let me give you an example from the season: pumpkins.



You got this pumpkin seed, which doesn't look anything like a pumpkin; and you put it in the ground, and it germinates, and it sprouts, and it begins to form this beautiful pumpkin, which, of course, contains a whole boatload of more seeds for later on and so forth. But isn't it interesting that you put that little thingy in the ground and up comes this big orange pumpkin? By the way, that's the technical term, thingy. Okay, write that down.

But anyway, I mean, the point that Paul is trying to really emphasize and make here is that as wonderful as this is, there is a similarity from the standpoint that in the resurrection, your body is the part that is planted, but it is just a seed; and he's trying to make the point that what comes forth is going to be amazing. It's going to be a miracle. It's going to be wonderful. In other words, the best is yet to come.

Think about the incredible job that God has done as an artist. I mean, when was the last time you looked at a sunset and just admired His incredible artistic ability to make things beautiful? Now, think about your resurrection body. Remember, He is the Master Artist. He can take this little seed. Think about flowers. He can take this little seed. Check this picture out.



You take this little tiny seed and you get something like that. I don't even know what that is. I mean, it's a flower, but other than that, I'm lost. But I do know something: It's beautiful; it's amazing. The point is, the resurrection body that you have, Paul likens here now to the planting of a seed and the growth.

He goes on to say in verse 39:

“For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. ⁴⁰ There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies (he's not talking about angels and people here; he's talking about heavenly bodies, as in the heavens), but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another.”

And then he makes it a little clearer when he says:

“⁴¹ There is (a particular) glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another (differing) glory of the (various) stars;” And then he says because stars

differ from other stars in glory, according to their intensity and so forth; and he's making a point that God has created different kinds of bodies; they differ; there are different elements and levels of glory.

He's saying all this because he's going to make several comparisons now in the coming verses. In fact, they're actually— he's going to contrast several things here, beginning in verse 42. Look at here; here's what he says:

“So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown (in our case, buried) is perishable (your Bible may say it is sown in corruption, but); what is raised is imperishable.”

Now, this is talking about our present bodies contrasted with the resurrection bodies that God is going to give us. Notice that he says our current body, that which is sown, that which is buried; he's talking about what we live in right now. He says it's perishable.

It's funny we don't think of the word, perishable often to describe our physical bodies. We might think about it as it relates to a can of peas, and say, well, those are perishable goods, right? Well, guess what? You have a shelf life. Sorry to bum you out about that, but the thing is, you're perishable just like that can of peas. You're only going to last for so long, and then you're going to expire. You're past the pull date, and when that happens, of course, the Lord calls you home.

He's basically saying it's the same way it is with our physical bodies. These physical bodies are perishable. They're subject to all kinds of diseases and problems and issues and broken bones and muscles that shrivel and stuff that we don't like to think about and we spend the majority of our life trying to get away from.

It's funny, here on this earth, we call living on earth the land of the living. It's actually the land of the dying. Every time you go by a cemetery, you're reminded of the fact that you live in a world that is dying among a people who are dying. You watch a drama on TV, somebody comes up with a terminal illness and they'll— as the music builds to a crescendo, they say to those people, I'm dying.

The fact of the matter is you were dying from the time you were born. The only thing that's different now is the doctor basically gave you a date to look forward to for that to happen. But the fact is we live in a world where we begin to die

from the very beginning. Death is going on all around us, and it is going on in us all the time.

Have I encouraged you yet today? Yeah, no, it's a bummer, isn't it? I mean, that's just that; life on earth is just like that.

But the bodies that we're going to receive from God, Paul uses the term imperishable to describe those no shelf life, no weaknesses, no breakdown possibilities, no broken bones, no issues, no diseases, no fatigue, no weakness, no muscle shriveling stuff going on. This is the way Paul describes it.

Look what he goes on—and he continues this contrasting. Verse 43; he says:

“It is sown (these bodies that we have are sown) in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.”

Interesting that Paul defines our present bodies as dishonorable and weak. Why dishonorable? Because they've been tainted by sin. Sin was never meant to defile the bodies that God created for you and I. Originally speaking, physical bodies for human beings were meant to be like they're going to be when we get our resurrection body.

These bodies were never meant to house a sinful nature; and they were never meant to be corrupted and defiled by that sinful nature. That was never God's plan. Your body was never meant to die. It dies because of sin. It gets sick and deteriorates because of sin.

The new bodies that we have, he says, he describes as full of glory and power. Our new bodies are going to be glorious and powerful. In fact, this word, power is the same word that is used to describe what happens or what moves through the life of a believer when they operate in spiritual gifts.

Remember when Jesus told His disciples in Acts 1? He said, guys, don't run off. Stay here in Jerusalem because in a few days the Holy Spirit is going to come upon you and you're going to receive power from on high to go out and do the work that you're called to do. That word “power” is the Greek word, **dynamis** (δύναμις), and it's the exact same word that's described here.

So, we get a little foretaste of what our bodies are going to be like as far as the characteristic of them from being able to operate in spiritual gifts—supernatural, powerful, incredible gifts of the Holy Spirit. But that only now characterizes the way we operate when we operate in the gifts of the Spirit. One

day it's going to characterize your body. It's going to be full of **dynamis**, full of power, power from God, that He gives you. It's going to be amazing.

Then he goes on in verse 44 to say:

“It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.”

One is going to—the spiritual body is going to come from the natural body. All right, now, this is important that we stop here for a moment and just check the language that Paul's using here because he says you have a natural body now, you're going to have a spiritual body then.

And that weirds people out a little bit because they think, okay, I'm going to have a spiritual body. What does that mean? Does that mean I'm going to be like Casper, the friendly ghost, or something? Like a phantom? Is that what that means?

No, it doesn't, actually. I want you to remember something. The resurrection bodies that we receive from the Lord are going to be very much—well, they're going to be in the same image or just like the resurrection body that Jesus had after resurrection when He appeared to His disciples. They were concerned that they were seeing a phantom because they saw the man die, and now here He was, standing in front of them.

Jesus could tell they were freaking out when He appeared to them; and so, you remember what He said to them? He says, you guys got something to eat? And they said, yeah, there's some fish around here somewhere. Somebody handed Him a piece of broiled fish, and He sat while they just looked at Him, and He ate it in front of them.

I can just imagine Him sitting there; they're just watching this thing because they don't know what's going on here. We saw this man die. We saw Him buried, right? And now He's eating a piece of fish. And then, remember, too, Jesus showed them His scars. He said, look at my hands. Put your hand here in my side where that spear went in. There was a scar.

The physicality of His spiritual body, it exists in the sense that—well, it's difficult to describe in what sense because we don't really have anything from which to compare it except our own physical bodies. We simply know that spiritual body doesn't mean we're invisible air floating around somewhere.

There is some element of physicality to our body, but it is also a body that will not be limited by space and other sort of laws of physics.

Remember when Jesus appeared to His disciples that night? You, guys, remember? It says that they were in a locked room for fear of the Jews, and they're all sitting around, they're talking about— Gee, what are we going to do? And they were afraid that they were going to be arrested, too, and perhaps suffer the same fate.

They're sitting around, they're in their little huddle, talking about it; and suddenly, Jesus is just standing amidst, in the room. He didn't come through the door. He didn't crawl through the window. He was just there. *“Peace be with you,”* which is all, by the way, a very good thing to say when you just appear in a room because they're going to need that badly.

You see, my point is that the physicality of His body, of this spiritual resurrection body, was not limited, is not limited to the things that you and I are limited to. And so, you need to remember that.

More contrast; verse 45. Paul says:

“Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam (and he's referring to Jesus there) became a life-giving spirit.”

He's making the point that the first man, Adam, became a living being after he was made of the dust of the earth, right? God breathed into him the breath of life. He became a living being. And he says, in the same way, all other human beings who came after Adam were made that same way; were made living beings. But we will one day take upon our Second Representative and the characteristics that He gives us, which is that life-giving Spirit.

He goes on; verse 46:

“But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. (There's an order to it.)”⁴⁷ The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.”

We've made the point. The Bible says that the first man was the man of dust. He was made of the dust. Remember that? Genesis? The Bible says God took the dust of the earth, literally dirt, and He formed it into a man and then breathed into him the breath of life.

Now, that's pretty interesting when you consider how long ago that was written in the Bible. Do you know that's a scientific statement? Do you know that if you break down the basic compounds and make up of a human body, you have the very same element compounds as dirt? How you like that? We're dirt. We're just animated dirt, in a very real sense of that sort of an understanding.

Isn't it interesting though that modern science got around to finally proving that, oh, what the Bible wrote so many years ago, yeah, that's true. That's interesting. Man was made from the dirt of the ground. Paul makes the point that the first man being from the earth, a man of dust; the Second Man is from heaven.

And then he says in verse 48:

“As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust (that's me and you), and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.”

That's what we will become. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the Man of heaven.

By the way that last verse is a promise, and I hope you saw it because you know the promises of God's Word are powerful, and we need to know them, and we need to hang on to them with everything we're worth.

Well, let me read verse 49 again:

“Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust (that's who you are), we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.”

And that's what we will become. And that is a wonderful promise from God's Word.

Paul goes on into verse 50:

“I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”

Now, what Paul is explaining in this verse is why we need these new physical bodies, these new physical/spiritual bodies that we're going to receive from the Lord one day, our resurrection bodies. Why? Because the kingdom that we're inheriting—

By the way, didn't you know you were inheriting a kingdom? I don't know if you knew that or not. You're inheriting a kingdom if you're in Christ, okay? That's pretty sweet. But this kingdom that you're inheriting is imperishable. It's never going to pass away. There's no shelf life to the kingdom. Those who are of the kingdom, in order to inherit the kingdom, need to, in like manner, have a body that has no shelf life. They need to have an imperishable body. That's the point that Paul is making here, right?

You might say, well, why? Because, you see, these physical bodies that we have were never meant to endure the environment of heaven. They can't do it. Because, you see, in heaven, where God's throne is, there is the unbridled glory of God that is just constantly there, and you and I can't bear that in these physical bodies that we have right here. They can't deal with it.

Do you remember in the Old Testament when Moses actually had the courage to ask to see God's face? He was up on the mountain receiving the law, and he said to God, let me see your face. You remember what God said? Well, listen Mo. I love you, and you're a good guy, but you can't see My face and live. No man can see My face and live.

What I will do is I'll hide you with My hand in the cleft of the rock while I pass by, and I'll shield you from My glory. But then as I'm passing by, I'll remove My hand so that you can see the trailing edge of My glory. But that's as much as you can handle.”

And that was enough to light up Moses like a Christmas tree. I mean, you'll remember he came down from the mountain and his face was glowing and the people were like, what in the world? So, he had to put a veil over his face so as not to freak them out, and that was the trailing edge of God's glory.

You and I can't handle God's glory. People will say something like, I just want God to appear in my bedroom and then I'll believe. Yeah, you'll be dust is what you'll be if God honored that particular request. You can't deal with the glory of God.

You cannot look upon the face of the Almighty, not until you have your imperishable body; and then we will be able to be and stand in the never-removed presence of God, and be able to behold the glory of His face, without just turning into so much vapor. That's why we need these new physical bodies.

Verse 51. Now, Paul gets into some cool stuff here. He says:

“Behold! I tell you a mystery (and the word “mystery” here means something that was previously unrevealed, which now God has made known; here it is; he says:) We shall not all sleep, (referring to death, because that's the way Christians— death for Christians is referenced in the Bible as sleep) but we shall all be changed...”

Now, what is he talking about here? Well, the question probably came up because he was talking earlier about how the seed has to fall into the ground and die; and he was using that as a picture of our death, and how we have to die so that the old body can give way for the new body to emerge, and so forth.

Well, somebody probably is thinking through this thing and going, wait a minute. What happens when Jesus returns? Because those people who are believers on the earth at that time are still alive. Are they not going to receive their new spiritual bodies?

And by the way, this is important for you to pay attention to because there's a very good chance that you might be that generation of people who are alive on the earth when Jesus returns. We don't know; it could be you. So, how are you—how's this going to work for you if you don't experience death?

He says, hey, let me tell you a little mystery. We're not all going to die but we will all be changed—he goes on in verse 52:

“in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (however long that takes), at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.”

What is Paul talking about? He's talking about the rapture—the rapture of the church. When Jesus comes back for His bride, the body of Christ, those who are alive on the earth at that time, Paul makes it very clear that the dead in Christ, meaning those who have gone before, and whose physical bodies have died, their new spiritual bodies will be raised imperishable.

They will be joined with those bodies, because remember, they're with the Lord at death, right? They don't go to sleep; they're with the Lord. But they will receive their new physical bodies, and then those who are on the earth alive will then be transformed, he said, *“in the twinkling of an eye.”*

Paul explained this whole process in his first letter to the Thessalonians. Let me put it on the screen for you. He says:

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 (ESV)

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. 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. 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.

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. (In other words, we're not going to receive our bodies before they do.) 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. 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.

Pretty sweet, huh? By the way, this is, again, talking about the rapture. There are some people who take issue with the teaching of the rapture, and they'll say, I don't believe in any rapture because, first of all, that word isn't in the Bible. Oh, yes, it is. Let me show you. See this third sentence up from the bottom?

“...we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds...”

That words that are translated, caught up, is where we get the word, rapture. In the Latin it's actually **raptūrus** and it's a very— it means, to be caught up in something. You can be caught up in music. I was just enraptured by that beautiful music. Or you see a sunset and you're enraptured. Meaning, I'm caught up in this beautiful scenic view that God has created.

Well, we're one day going to be caught up, literally, physically, by the Lord, to meet the Lord in the air. We call it the rapture of the church, the rapture of the body of Christ. This is where true believers in Jesus are caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

But Paul says it's not going to happen until those who have gone before receive their new spiritual resurrection bodies, and then we will be transformed in the twinkling of an eye. Pretty sweet for that generation not to have to experience death. Amen? I mean think about that for a little while. How sweet is that?

Anyway, Paul ends the chapter this way—verse 53; look in your Bible:

“For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ 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.””

And by the way, this is basically a quote from Isaiah. It's a loose quote from Isaiah chapter 25. I'll show you here where the prophet speaks; and it says:

Isaiah 25: 7-8 (ESV)

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

And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. (Look again:) 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.

Isn't that a wonderful prophecy? I mean, that's just glorious. 700 years before Christ was even born on the earth, the prophet Isaiah spoke these words and prophesied that God was going to do away with death—and that's because the new physical bodies that we receive in Christ will not have the limitations as our current bodies have.

And so, guess what we get to do? We get to taunt death. Look at verse 55 in your Bible. This is a taunt. This will get you a yellow flag in the NFL. You can't taunt, but you can taunt death. Look what he said:

“O death, where is your victory? (Thought you were so tough?) O death, where is your sting?”

By the way, that's a quote from the Old Testament Book of Hosea, where, again, the Lord speaks through one of His prophets, to literally taunt this enemy, this death that we think of as probably the ultimate bogeyman, if you're going to personify death, I suppose.

Here's this ultimate quintessential enemy who we don't even want to think about. Some of us won't even go to funerals or walk near cemeteries. I don't want to be anywhere around death. Don't even talk to me about it because it's just this ultimate thing that scares us completely to the core of our being.

I was going to say scares us to death, but that'd be dumb. But you know what I mean; we don't even want to deal with it. And yet as Christians, we can not only deal with it, we can taunt it! You thought you were big sort of a thing! How cool is that? Look at death! Where is your victory, death? Where is your sting?

Charles Spurgeon wrote something about— he did his own taunt. I like this; check this out. It's written in old King James English, and I don't do this very well. He says:

I will not fear thee, death, why should I? Thou lookest like a dragon, but thy sting is gone. Thy teeth are broken, oh old lion, wherefore should I fear thee? I know thou art no more able to destroy me, but thou art sent as a messenger to conduct me to the golden gate wherein I shall enter and see my savior's unveiled face for ever.

— Charles Spurgeon

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I know that's weird language to understand in today's vernacular, but basically what Spurgeon was saying is: Death, you have no power over me. The only thing that you can do, the worst you can do is usher me into the presence of my Savior.

That's all you can do, is bring me to where I'm going. That's all you can do. You can't terrorize me. You can't demonize me. You can't taunt me. In fact, I'm going to taunt you. Where is your sting? Where is your victory? It's gone. It's been stripped from you by my Savior who conquered you.

Yeah, I like that.

Verse 56:

“The sting of death is sin (we talked about that; sin is the power behind it), and the power of sin is the law.⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Through His power, those things, death and sin, have been defeated. And then we come to this final verse, which Paul declares in view of all the certainty of the resurrection. He says:

“⁵⁸ 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.”

Why does he say that your labor is not in vain? Because there's a resurrection coming, and there's going to be a reward process at the resurrection. So, know this—know that the way you live, know that the way you serve, know that the way you love, there's better things coming. God is going to bless you. He's going to give you things that you can't even begin to understand today.

Know this: Your labor is not in vain. You're not doing these things for no reason. There are great things coming, wonderful things coming. In fact, the best is yet to come.