

INTRODUCTION

Ford trucks really aren't "built tough to last." They're only going to last a few years, but the resurrection body that you and I receive is going to last for all eternity. If I were giving a final exam on 1 Corinthians, one of the questions for sure that I would ask is this, "What are the three main problems that Paul addresses in his letter to the church of Corinth?" They had a problem with immorality and sexual sin in the church. Number two, immaturity. Paul says he ought to be writing to them as mature believers, but he had to write to them as babes. And the third problem was with immortality...understanding what would happen after a Christian dies. Paul devotes almost the entire 15th chapter to addressing this third problem. First Corinthians 15:35-49 says:

³⁵ But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" ³⁶ How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. ³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. ³⁹ Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. ⁴⁰ There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. ⁴¹ The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. ⁴² So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵ So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"^[a]; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we^[b] bear the image of the heavenly man.

I. THE CONFUSION ABOUT THE RESURRECTION

Paul argues about the validity of the resurrection. And anytime somebody is arguing for something, they presume opposing questions. So he says in verse 35, "But someone may ask how are the dead raised and with what kind of body will they come?"

1. Resurrection is undesirable

There were many different ideas about whether or not there would be a resurrection. One group said resurrection is undesirable. They didn't want a physical resurrection, and we call these people the Gnostics. And also those who followed the teachings of Plato fell into the group that said the only thing that is really pure, and the only thing that is really good, is the invisible part of a person, the soul. Did you know that Plato was one of the first ones who taught the immortality of the soul? It was Plato who taught that, that as a soul, we have always existed. And as a soul, we will always exist. But Plato was only half right.

We have not always existed. Only God and God alone is from lasting to everlasting. But the teaching of Plato and other Greek philosophers had filtered down into the church. There was a group of these super spiritual Christians call Gnostics. And that word comes from the Greek word “ginosko, which means “to know secrets” that nobody else knows. They were going around saying people don't need a resurrection because when we die and our spirits go to be with God, that's all that we need. This old body is evil, it's impure, it's sinful; so get rid of this old body because the soul is only thing that's pure. There are some people today like that who are saying, “Don't worry about what you do to your body because one day your body's going to be gone. You can treat your body any way you want to because it's what's inside your soul and your spirit that really matters.”

No, your body is important to God. Why? Because the Bible says that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. And so God not only saves your soul, but God is going to even resurrect your body.

2. Resurrection is impossible

So one group was saying resurrection is undesirable. We don't want it. But number two, there was another group that was saying that resurrection is impossible. It's just totally impossible. And they're the ones asking these foolish questions of Paul. And they they're saying in verse 35 to explain how are the dead raised and what kind of body are they going to have? Even the Early Church and the Jewish leaders were divided over the reality of the resurrection. And it stems back to the two different groups of Judaism: Sadducees and Pharisees.

Paul was well aware of the debate,

And there's disagreement. In Acts 23 there is an example of how the apostle Paul knew that there was a great division over whether or not a resurrection would occur. Here's the setting. Paul has gone back to Jerusalem after he's become a Christian. He's in the temple, but Timothy's there with him. And they accuse him of bringing a Gentile into the temple, and a riot breaks out. And he's arrested by the Romans and they're getting ready to the two flogging. And because he's getting ready to be flogged, Paul kind of turns over and says, “Oh, by the way, you flog

Roman citizen?" That scared that Roman soldier to death, because he could be put to death for flogging a Roman citizen.

He said to Paul, "You're a Roman citizen?" Paul said yes and the soldier said that was out of his jurisdiction! So they took him before the Jewish Sanhedrin. And here's the apostle Paul as a Christian standing before the Sanhedrin, the same group that just years before had sentenced Jesus to die. So Acts says, "Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and other Pharisees, he called out in the Sanhedrin, "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead." So a fight broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the assembly was divided. The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection and that there are neither angels nor spirits. And as you've heard me say before, that's why they were "sad, you see"? They didn't believe in any of those supernatural things, but the Pharisees acknowledged them all. And so I just wanted you to see that the Jewish leaders were divided over whether or not there was even a resurrection.

Many skeptics are still saying how can it happen? Because when a body dies, what happens to that body? Well, it begins to decay, begins to rot, to put it delicately. And what about a body that's been dead for 200 or 300 years? There's absolutely really nothing there. And so the skeptics were saying, "Hey, it's totally impossible." There was an interesting event that place a number of years ago in Colonial America. Roger Williams was one of the first Baptists in America? He was a Baptist preacher as well. When Roger Williams died, he was buried. And later on, people looked back at the life of Roger Williams as such a great leader for Rhode Island and among the founders of America. So they wanted to dig up the body of Roger Williams and move him to a place of prominence. But an apple tree nearby had sent its roots so deeply into the soil that the roots had gone through the casket and had woven itself into what used to be the body of Roger Williams. And there was basically nothing there. He became fertilizer for that apple tree, and everybody who had ever eaten an apple off that apple tree was carrying a bit of Roger Williams with them. And that's the truth. They didn't move him because they couldn't, there was nothing left there. And the roots of that apple tree had destroyed what was there. What about Roger Williams? How is God going to resurrect Roger Williams? When everybody who's eaten an apple from that tree is carrying part of Roger Williams with him?

That's the attitude of skeptics. How's God going to do something like that? It's not too hard for God. God can take an atom from over here, a molecule from over here, a particle from over here, and he can bring them back together with great ease. Nothing is impossible with God. But that's what skeptics are saying. How can there even be a resurrection?

II. THE COMPARISONS OF THE RESURRECTION

In the last section of this passage, Paul says to just look at nature. And you can see that God is in the business of restoring and God is a God of variety. He compares the resurrection to things from nature. Now we suspect that at this point, Paul is really doing a written rebuttal to some people who call themselves intellectuals, who are disputing the resurrection. Because back during these days, those who were philosophers talked about the basic sciences like agriculture, biology, and astronomy. And so Paul is going to employ these studies of science to illustrate the resurrection. He uses three illustrations.

1. Botany

First of all, he uses an illustration from botany in verse 3. When you plant a seed, something else comes up. Now all of us can relate to that. I planted some green bean seeds. I prepared the soil and I planted the seeds. Now, you know what those seeds were. They were just little beans themselves. I probably could have soaked those beans and I probably could have eaten those beans, but instead I took those beans and I put them in the ground. They died and that seed ceased to become a bean. Now we all know how plants grow. We've studied it. That seed basically broke open and the seed itself was destroyed. But what took its place was the root and then a stem and then leaves. And if you look inside those bean pods, what you've got is what that seed was originally.

And what Paul is trying to say is that the resurrection is like when you plant a seed. Jesus used the same analogy in John chapter 12, talking about himself. He said, unless a seed falls in the earth and dies, it will never bring forth fruit. He was talking about his body. And Paul is talking about your body. When you're buried in the ground, it's like a seed and you cease to become anything. Because as we're going to talk about in a moment, as much as we try to preserve the body, nature's going to have its way. But it's going to be changed into something somewhat like the original seed, but something much better.

Seeds are powerful things. In 1922, archeologists uncovered the grave of King Tut. And you know what they discovered in his sarcophagus? Seeds that dated back to almost 3000 BC. And you know what they did with those seeds? By this time, they were 5,000 years old. They planted them in the ground and they grew. That's the power of a seed.

2. Zoology

Paul says to consider different kinds of flesh. He says humans don't have the same kind of flesh as animals, and birds don't have the same kind of flesh as fish. He's trying to say that God has the power to make anything he wants. And God is a God of infinite variety. Now I came across some interesting statistics as I was studying for this. A noted scientist says there are 600 octillion different combinations of amino acids, basically the building blocks of life. One octillion is 10 to the hundred and eighth power. That means it's a one followed by 108 zeros.

Now that's the only one octillion. And this scientist says that there are 600! What he's trying to say is that no two kinds of life are exactly the same. There are different combinations. Each type of life has a distinctive pattern of amino acids and also its own unique grouping. No two flowers, no two snowflakes, no two seeds, no two blades of grass and no two people are alike. Even identical twins are not exactly alike. Yet each one is identified with its own species. God is so powerful and there are so many different combinations of different kinds of life that there are no two living things on earth that are the same. Each one has its own individuality.

There is not another plant like this anywhere. There's not another person like David Riddle anywhere. Thank God. No, I'm just kidding. I mean, no two people are exactly the same. If you don't think God is a God of variety, just look at the person's nose next to you. People are all different. And that's what Paul is saying here. There are all different kinds of flesh, and a God who can do that is a God who can raise the dead.

3. Astronomy

He says there are different kinds of splendor in the sky. He said, here's the sun. And here's the moon. And here are the stars. A lot of the things that we see in the sky at night aren't stars at all. Some of them are planets. Some tightly group stars are actually distant galaxies, and a God who has that kind of variety to create that kind of stellar sky is the God who can raise the dead.

The sun in the sky doesn't even look as big as the moon many times, but we know that it is so far away, 193 million miles away, that it takes eight minutes for the light and the heat from the sun to reach planet earth. And we know that the sun generates its own light and its own power. But on the other hand, the moon is dead, but yet it reflects the light of the sun.

Paul is just saying a God like that can raise the dead. He looks at animals. A God that can create all kinds of life can raise the dead. A God who can make a seed turn into a plant can raise the dead. Now I think also what he's trying to say here is that when God does raise the dead, everyone will maintain their individuality.

People often ask me, "When we get to heaven, will we know each other?" Absolutely. I think that's what Paul's trying to say here. There are at least seven reasons why I know that we'll identify and recognize everybody in heaven. AI could give you many, many more reasons, but there are at least seven reasons why I know that you'll know people in heaven.:

1. In 2 Samuel 12 when David's newborn infant died he said, "He cannot return to me, but I can go to him." He's saying that little child maintained its individuality and I'm going to go to that child. And I will know that child is my newborn child.

2. Jesus said that God, didn't say he was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jesus said that God said, "I am. I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." What does that mean? Well, it means that when we get to heaven, there's going to be an Abraham who will be distinguished from Isaac who will be distinguished from Jacob.

3. At the transfiguration of Jesus, Moses and Elijah appeared. And they were individuals. Jesus could look at one and say, "You're Moses." Then Jesus could look at the other and say, "You're Elijah." They maintained their identity.

4. Jesus said your names are written in the Lamb's book of life. He didn't say some impersonal number. He said your names. You are identified as an individual in heaven.

5. The Bible says in Luke 15 that when Lazarus died and the angels carried him to Abraham's bosom, the rich man looked up into heaven and knew who Lazarus was and he could identify Abraham.

6. The Bible says that when we see Jesus, we will be like him. And after Jesus was resurrected from the dead, they could identify who Jesus was. When the disciples came back from the empty tomb on the first Easter morning, they said, "We have seen the Lord." They didn't say we saw "somebody." They didn't say, "We didn't know who it was." They said they saw the Lord. And just as he was identified and recognized, so will you be.

7. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 that now we know in part, but it says then we shall know, even as we are known. What does that mean? It means that the same way God knows you now is the way that you will know other people when you get to heaven. And let me ask you, "Does God know you individually?" Absolutely. He knows how many hairs are on your head and you're going to know people that way too in heaven.

So that's just seven reasons, but I think Paul is arguing that we will know each other in heaven.

III. THE CONTRASTS

In verses 42 through 44, Paul continues his argument about our resurrection body. He says if there is a natural body, there is a spiritual body. So he contrasts the two.

The 38 people who committed suicide in the Heaven's Gate cult it's unfortunate that they even identified themselves with the Bible or Christianity. But one of the main teachings of this cult was that this body is evil. And as quickly as possible, we need to try to leave this body and escape from it. And that's why these people so easily could destroy this body because they felt like that they were leaving something evil and going to something better. You see, friend, that was a tragic mistake and a terrible miscalculation.

When you die, it is this same body that the Lord is going to renovate and raise and change. And now Paul is going to contrast the differences between how your body is now and how it's going to be when it gets buried. And what it's going to be like when your body is raised. You don't get some new body; it's still this one, but he just changes it. He makes three contrasts:

1. Durability

The natural body and the spiritual body are different in durability...how long they'll last. What does he say? He says this body that we have right now, it is perishable. Now what does the word "perishable" mean? When you bring something home from the grocery store, it is perishable. What does that mean? It means you better eat it fast, or you better freeze it, or you better put it in the refrigerator because it's going to spoil. And that's what Paul is saying. He said this old body that we have right now, it is going to rot. It's going to decay. It's going to be corrupted into nothing after it's buried. In fact, that's what Martha, the sister of Lazarus, said when Jesus came to the tomb of her brother. Jesus wanted the stone rolled away and Martha said, "Lord, you better not do that. He's been dead for four days. He stinks."

A man that I knew in Alabama was on the frontline of some of the Allied soldiers who liberated Berlin. And he still has nightmares of over what they discovered in some of the concentration camps, but he said 20 miles before they ever reached the concentration camp, the stench was overwhelming. He said he'd never smelled anything like that before. He has never smelled anything like it since that was 20 But the resurrection body is imperishable. I think that means that you'll never have to use deodorant in your resurrection body. You'll never have to take a bath. You'll never have to use mouthwash because there's none of this decaying or aging process that takes place. Now I thank God for Christian funeral directors, but what we desperately try to do at funerals at funerals is hide the fact that the body is going to be decaying. We embalm bodies and make that casket as tight as we can. We put it in a vault and we make that vault as tight as we can. We cover it up with dirt. We covered up with flowers. We play nice music and make it as pleasant as we can. But none of that can hide the fact that this old body is going to rot. That's just a fact of nature. But Paul says this body that we have will be replaced with a new body that will never decay. It will never perish. It will endure forever.

2. Value

You know what he says about our current body in verse 43? He said it is sown in dishonor. It's raised in glory. Now that's a very technical word that talks about civil rights. Did you know a dead corpse has no rights? A corpse has no honor. In fact, it's just flesh that has no life in it. He says that a dead body is worth nothing. What do you do with the dead body? You dispose of it as quickly as you can. But, he said, the new resurrection body is going to be valuable. It's going to be glorious.

It's going to be something that you'll want to spend time with that you'll want to protect and cherish. A dead body is dishonor, but a resurrection body is precious.

3. Strength

There's a difference between your current natural body and your resurrection body. In verse 43 he says it is buried in weakness and raised in power. Some people are stronger physically than others. Male weightlifters can lift amazing amounts of weight. It's just amazing how they can get under there and lift it up. But have you noticed that every single one has a limit? There's a point where they add weights and they can no longer lift it.

As much as we exercise and as much as we try to make our bodies strong, Paul says this body is basically weak. We're all susceptible to sickness, to illness, to disease. But the body, when it is raised, it will be a body of strength. There are no hospitals in heaven, no vaccinations, no sickness. There will be no need for you to worry about being weak in heaven. You'll have all the strength that you need.

IV. THE CONCLUSION

1. We're like Adam now

In verses 45 through 49, Paul is saying the problem right now is that you're like Adam. But the good news is you're going to be like Jesus. One man was from the dust of the earth, and one man is from heaven. We are like Adam; we are from the dust and ashes. That's what we are right now. And did you know that because you're in Adam's family, you inherited some pretty terrible traits? First of all, you inherited a tendency to sin. Number two, you inherited the curse of sin that was pronounced upon Adam and Eve. And number three, you inherited death from Adam? And that's all because of the consequences of original sin. That's why right now, in this body that we're in, we suffer and eventually it's going to die. But the good news is number two.

2. We will be like Jesus

Jesus is a prototype of who we're going to be in the resurrection. After the resurrection of Jesus, and before he ascended back into heaven, what was Jesus like? Philippians chapter three verse 21 says, "...who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, he will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." Now you really want to know what you're going to be like when Jesus comes back? The easiest way to answer that is you're going to be like Jesus. And what were some of the traits and characteristics of Jesus in his resurrection form? He was totally different than the way we are right now. Jesus could transport himself in different ways other than walking. He was at one place, and he could vanish and suddenly he could be at another place. Kind of sounds like Star Trek. That's what Jesus could do. So in your resurrection body, you're not going to be bound by time and space.

Jesus also could suddenly appear in a room from behind closed doors. He did that on the first Easter evening. The 10 disciples (12 minus Judas and Thomas who didn't show up) were gathered. The door was locked, but suddenly, there was Jesus in the midst. You're going to be like Jesus. Time and space will not hinder you or restrict you in the resurrection body.

Jesus also ate in his resurrection body. One of the first things he asked the disciples that night where they were hiding behind a locked door was, "Do you have anything to eat?" That sounds good to me! And it sounds good to you! Did you think that for all eternity you're just going to be kind of floating around on a cloud, playing a harp? No, you're going to eat. It's going to be good for you. You're going to enjoy it. There will be no regrets the next day for eating too much.

But do you know something else about the resurrection body that we know for sure? And I'm not speculating here. It will be something you can feel. What did Jesus say to the disciples? He said, "Touch me. Does a spirit have flesh and bones?" He didn't say flesh and blood. I don't know if that omission is significant or not. But you're not going to be just some spirit. You will have a literal resurrection body that people will be able to touch and see and handle. What are we going to look like? How old am I going to be in heaven? You ready? I'll give you the answer. I have no idea. I don't mind saying what I don't know when I don't know. And the Bible doesn't say.

I heard some preachers say everyone is going to be 33 in heaven because that's how old Jesus was when he was resurrected. Well, I tell you that's fishing because the Bible doesn't say that. I don't know how old you're going to be, but I do know that whatever age you are, you'll be mighty satisfied. Somebody said that people may just be the age they really want to be. Who knows? But that's what you're going to be like in the resurrection.

Michael Faraday was one of the early chemists who led the way in scientific research. He was in his laboratory one day and a lady friend of his came in wearing an expensive gold bracelet. And she was looking around and she waved her arm and the clasp on that gold bracelet broke and it splashed into a vat of pure caustic acid. And it bubbled up and dissolved and she was horrified. But Michael said not to worry. He added a re-agent to the acid and then poured off the acid. Inside was the gold residue. They collected the gold residue, and he took it down to a jeweler who formed it into a bracelet more beautiful than the original. And she was so happy and so thrilled to receive the new bracelet back.

That's what's going to happen to you. That's what's going to happen to me. This body's going to be dissolved, collected, reformed and refashioned. It will be a whole lot better than the one I'm living in right now.

OUTLINE

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