

# 1 Cor. 15.35-58: Resurrection (3)

## The Properties of a Resurrection Body [vv.35-49]

**v.35:** Having outlined the problems of denying resurrection (vv.12-34), Paul turns his attention to the apparent mocking questions of those influenced by Greek philosophy. That these are not genuine questions but designed to ridicule the credibility of resurrection seems evident by Paul's strong censure, "Thou fool" or 'Foolish man!' (v.36). The mockers had failed to take God into their consideration. Dualism considered the physical body to be intrinsically evil; the idea of a resurrected body was therefore repugnant – they were looking forward to the liberation of a spiritual afterlife without the shackles of a physical body. Hence, they asked *two* interrelated questions: **1.** "How are the dead raised up?" – either a reference to the *mechanics* of resurrection, *or* an incredulous 'How is it possible?' **2.** "With what body do they come?" – questioning the *form* of a resurrected body. As far as they were concerned, a dead body decomposes and dissolves into the earth. How could it then be reassembled and reanimated in resurrection? Paul responds in four ways showing that the power of God will effect a bodily resurrection – it is not *reconstruction* (the same body) or *reincarnation* (a new body), but *resurrection* – a changed body suited to the heavenly sphere.

## The Picture of Sowing Seed [vv.36-38]

**v.36:** The "foolish man" might have noticed these principles when he himself sowed any seed. A seed does not come to life ("quicken") unless it is first planted in the ground. When buried, the seed apparently dies and decomposes, but from its very shell, new life appears. How foolish, therefore, to argue that a physical body can't live again because it has died! **v.37:** And what is put *into* the ground (the "bare" seed) is not the same as that which comes *up*. The identity of the seed is preserved, though it springs up with a vastly different body. FB Hole notes, "*The acorn is buried, but the oak springs up. Every seed has what we may call its own special resurrection body in which it comes forth. The bearing of this on the point before us is plain. The dead body of that saint is laid in the grave: in the resurrection it will come up vastly different, yet with its identity preserved.*" **v.38:** In all this, the power of God is at work. The Creator has divinely coded each seed to bring forth "his own (unique) body" including root system, stems, foliage and flowers. "God giveth" is in the *present* tense – He is constantly at work in creation, even causing the grass to grow (Psalm 104.14). "As it hath pleased Him" (*aorist*) refers to the single act of creation which determined the inherent and distinctive code of each seed and therefore the body it produces. Paul will draw the conclusion a little later (v.42), but the principal lesson is clear – the God that created a huge variety of different seeds and coded those same seeds to always produce the same unique and distinctive body can easily raise the dead and transform their bodies into something gloriously different. Resurrection bodies will differ from one another, as natural bodies do today, yet all "fashioned like unto his glorious body" (Philippians 3.21). The plant that comes out of the ground is different in *form* and *appearance* to the seed, but the same in *nature* and *kind* (a poppy seed produces a poppy plant). In resurrection, believers will be known and recognisable, but in a vastly different and more glorious form.

## The Provision of Suitable Bodies [vv.39-41]

**v.39:** Paul makes a short digression to prove God has no difficulty in making a vast array of different bodies, each perfectly fitted to their proper environment. He has already created variety in terms of *substance* (v.39), *sphere* (v.40) and *splendour* (v.41). It is therefore a simple thing for God to provide believers with bodies perfectly suited for resurrection life in the glorious and eternal sphere of heaven. First, "all flesh is not the same flesh" – whether human beings, animals, fish or birds, each have bodies suited to their particular environment and function. The word "flesh" here is not moral but denotes the body, structure or tissue of the life-forms concerned. **v.40:** God has also made a variety of bodies in two different *spheres* – the "celestial" (heavenly) and "terrestrial" (earthly). Both have a "glory" (*splendour* or *radiance*) suited to the realm in which they are placed. There is a splendour *both* in the earthly and heavenly creation which manifests the character of its Creator (Psalm 19.1-6). **v.41:** The glory of the heavenly bodies differs in *degree* – the splendour of the sun differs from that of the moon, and not all stars shine with the same intensity. This is not a veiled reference to degrees of reward as if some resurrected bodies will be more glorious than others. Rather, and in summary, both earthly and heavenly bodies have different *kinds* [*heteros*, v.40] of glory, and this glory varies in *degree* [*allos*, v.41] amongst heavenly bodies. So, the resurrection body will be *different* in glory, and *far more* glorious than the natural body.

## The Properties of a Spiritual Body [vv.42-44]

**v.42:** "So also is the resurrection of the dead" completes Paul's short detour and applies the lessons of vv.37-38. What comes *out* of the ground is closely related to what went in, but vastly different in terms of character and appearance. The seed is *dull* and *deathly* in appearance, whilst the living plant which springs from it is *vigorous* and *vibrant*. So, in resurrection, there is *continuity* since it is the same person who is raised, but *discontinuity* in the nature of their raised

body. In these three verses, Paul uses the verbs “sown” and “raised” four times to continue the natural metaphor of sowing seed (vv.36-38) but also to emphasise the difference between what *is* and what *will be*. [The analogy of differing kinds of bodies (vv.39-41) is continued in v.44]. Whilst the word “sown” *could* refer to the burial of a human body, the word was generally used as a metaphor in the Greco-Roman world to describe earthly human origin and birth. “Sown” therefore describes what is characteristic of our natural bodies from birth, as belonging to Adam’s fallen race. The word “raised” describes the resurrection (or changed) body we will receive from Christ, the life-giving Spirit.

Verse	Character of the <i>Natural</i> Body (Adam)	Character of the <i>Spiritual</i> Body (Christ)
42	<b>Corruption</b> [ <i>phthorá</i> ]. Perishable, to deteriorate from an original condition by <i>decay</i> , <i>decomposition</i> and <i>disintegration</i> . Describes the condition of creation due to sin (Romans 8.21).	<b>Incorruption</b> [ <i>aphtharsía</i> ]. Imperishable, no longer subject to sickness or decay. This body will never deteriorate but retain its primitive condition of excellence and beauty (Revelation 21.2).
43	<b>Dishonour</b> [ <i>atimía</i> ]. Or ‘humiliation’ (cf. Philippians 3.21). The natural body is shamed by the presence and practice of sin – being the vehicle through which sin operates (Romans 6.6).	<b>Glorify</b> [ <i>dóxa</i> ]. Honourable, being free from the power of sin, evil passions and lusts. A body which <i>radiates</i> the glory of sinless perfection and <i>manifests</i> the moral character of Christ (1 John 3.2).
43	<b>Weakness</b> [ <i>asthéneia</i> ]. Plagued by illness (Acts 28.9), injury, infirmity (John 5.5) and ultimately death. A fragile tenement of clay.	<b>Power</b> [ <i>dúnamis</i> ]. A powerful body, instinct with energy. All that the Spirit wills, the body will accomplish (cp. Matthew 26.41). Then we shall run and not be weary, we shall walk and not faint.
44	<b>Natural</b> [ <i>psuchikós</i> ]. Literally, ‘soulish’ – bodies that are sensual, being governed by sight, touch, taste etc. Ideal as a ‘house’ to enjoy the physical, earthly realm.	<b>Spiritual</b> [ <i>pneumatikós</i> ]. <u>Not</u> a body composed of spirit, but a <i>material</i> body empowered and animated by the Spirit. This body (and person) will be totally responsive to the prompting of the Spirit.

Thus the “spiritual” body will be perfectly suited to life in the spiritual and heavenly realm. David Gilliland says, “A natural man in a natural body is a *tragedy*. A spiritual man in a natural body (every believer) is a *tension*. But soon there will be spiritual men in spiritual bodies – an eternal *triumph*!” The final statement of the verse is an earnest affirmation of the truth Paul has taught. NET reads, “If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.” The very existence and presence of a natural body presupposes the existence of a spiritual body. It is just as certain and indisputable.

### The Person of the Second Man [vv.45-49]

The contrast between the *natural* (earthly) and *spiritual* (heavenly) body causes Paul to discuss the source and chronology of both. There are two *representative* heads (Adam and Christ) of two *races* (v.45). These heads are from two *realms* (earth and heaven, v.47) and produce in their posterity two *resemblances* (vv.48-49).

- **Two representatives and races (v.45).** The “first man” Adam was made a “living soul” (Genesis 2.7). Man was animated with the breath of God causing him to become a living being. In Hebrew the word for “soul” describes the whole person – the consciousness principle. Thus, Adam became an animated being, endowed with life from God. As the *first* man (there was no pre-Adamic race) he became head and progenitor of the *natural* human race, passing his nature to all his descendants. From him we received our natural bodies. By way of contrast, Paul introduces the Lord Jesus as “the last Adam”. He is the Head and progenitor (source) of a new *spiritual* race and order of manhood. Being the “last” Adam, He will never be superseded by another head or race! In Him God has reached perfection and finality. Hence Christ is described as a “quickening (life-giving) spirit” – Adam *received* life, but Christ *imparts* life to all those who belong to Him. The word “spirit” does not suggest Christ became ‘immaterial’ at His resurrection (cf. Luke 24.39), but rather that in resurrection He belongs to the *spiritual* realm with a *spiritual* body (v.44) and is able to impart life to every believer. As the Firstfruits, He belongs to and has instituted a new order of manhood that will be resurrected, like Him, with spiritual bodies.
- **v.46:** The broad principle is the *natural* first, followed by the *spiritual* – which is true in salvation, and the case of Adam before Christ. But the *neuter* suggests Paul has the body in mind. So, the *natural* body will precede the *spiritual* resurrection body. Existence in a spiritual body is not for now. The word “afterward” likely links back to v.23 where the same word is employed. We all inhabit “natural” bodies perfectly suited to earth now, but at Christ’s coming [*parousía*] we shall all be changed or raised with “spiritual” bodies perfectly suited to heaven.
- **Two realms (v.47).** The “first man”, Adam, was ‘out from’ [*ek*] the earth [*gḗ*], “earthly” [*choikós*], that is, made or formed from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2.7). The absence of a definite article suggests character and nature is in view as well as origin. Not only was Adam *made* from the earth (and therefore subject to decay and death), but he was also *earthly* in character. His life was earth-bound. Not so the “second man”! The Lord Jesus is called the “second man” because between Adam and He there was no other head. He was earlier called “the last Adam”

because there will not be a *third* head! Cain was literally and actually the second man in time, but he and all of Adam's posterity (including us!) are not counted because they are merely reproductions of Adam (Genesis 5.3). However, Christ is entirely different. He is "the second man" from [ek] heaven.<sup>1</sup> The Latin Vulgate renders this, "the second man from heaven is heavenly". He is essentially and characteristically *heavenly* in origin and character. He is therefore the Head of a new order of manhood – the heavenly order. The language and context suggest the *resurrected* and *glorified* Lord is in view, not His *incarnation*. He is the heavenly Man seated at God's right hand.

- **Two resemblances (vv.48-49).** As those who belong to Adam's race, we are like him. The word "image" suggests 'likeness' or 'similarity' in appearance and character. Like Adam, we have natural bodies of dust subject to decay and death, bodies that are soulish and conditioned for life on earth. Such a modest material from which mankind is formed (and will return) symbolises his lowly estate. Henry Law says, "*We are all made of the same base material. The material you normally wipe off the soles of your shoes before entering a reasonably furnished house.*"
- But, since we have born the image of the earthy in this world, those who have links to the "heavenly" man, Christ, "shall also bear the image of the heavenly" in the world to come! We shall be "conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8.30), being perfect representations and manifestations of Christ, not Adam! We shall be like Christ *physically* (Philippians 3.21) and *morally* (1 John 3.2). Note Paul says "**are** heavenly" – not only is this their future and eternal destiny but this is the character of their spiritual life *now*. FB Hole says, "*Behaviour which is low, and carnal, and earthly, and worldly, does not befit those who are heavenly.*" Believers are characteristically heavenly!

### The Prospect of Transformation [vv.50-58]

**v.50:** In this final section, Paul reveals that not every believer will die! Instead, when Christ comes to the air, "all" will be changed – those who have *died* will be raised "incorruptible" and those who are *alive* will be instantly transformed. This is essential if we are to dwell in an incorruptible and eternal sphere. Death and the grave will be permanently conquered and vanquished. He closes with a strong practical appeal to be busy in service for the Lord in the meantime.

"Now this I say" signifies an *important* and *weighty* pronouncement. It is not possible for "flesh and blood" (corruption) to "inherit the kingdom of God" (an incorruptible sphere). "Flesh and blood" is a Jewish idiom for a *human being* or 'mere mortal'. Its close relation with the word "corruption" suggests perishable humanity is in view. The "kingdom of God" is a wide-ranging term and subject, but largely refers to the literal, physical 1,000-year millennial reign of Christ on earth. We must remember there are different aspects to the Kingdom: **1.** Today, the kingdom is in *patience* – the earth is waiting for the coming King. **2.** The kingdom will be established in *power* on His return. **3.** The kingdom will be revealed in *perfection* in eternity. It is this last aspect Paul has in mind for two reasons. First, he has already mentioned the kingdom in v.24 where it is delivered up to the Father at the end of the millennium thus heralding the commencement of the eternal state. Second, mortal "flesh and blood" *will* inherit the kingdom on earth when Christ reigns. For example, the "Judgment of the Living Nations" describes Gentiles who are ushered into the kingdom in natural human bodies (Matthew 25.34). Though death will be the exception during the millennium, it will occur (Isaiah 65.20). So, Paul is establishing that mere mortals cannot "inherit" (enter) the *heavenly* or *eternal* aspect of the Kingdom. What is "corruptible" – natural, earthly bodies – *cannot* inherit "incorruption" – the spiritual, eternal and heavenly sphere. By the use of these phrases, it is possible Paul is already preparing our minds for the revelation of v.51ff. "Flesh and blood" would refer to those who are living at the rapture – they will be changed (cf. John 11.26; 1 Thessalonians 4.17). "Corruption" refers to those who have died – they shall be raised "incorruptible" (cf. John 11.25).

**v.51:** The question arises as to *how* and *when* we shall obtain these spiritual bodies. The "mystery" (revelation) Paul now unfolds is not so much the *translation* of the saints (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4.15-17) but the *transformation* of the living. OT saints knew of the resurrection of the dead – in fact, the resurrection of men at the end of human history was commonly accepted Jewish belief (cf. John 11.24; Acts 23.8). But they knew nothing of individuals being raised out from among the dead (i.e. *selective* rather than *general* resurrection) and the *natural* bodies of living saints being changed into *spiritual* bodies without ever experiencing death. "Sleep" is a lovely euphemism for the experience of the body after death. Scripture holds no thought of 'soul sleep' (people do not cease to exist or lose consciousness after death), but the body rests in the ground ready to be awakened in the day of resurrection. Note the double mention of the word "all". Not every believer will see death, *but* every believer will be "changed" (transformed). That "all" will be changed at the coming of Christ is evidence that Paul has in view the *first* (private) aspect of Christ's second coming – the **rapture**, not the *second* (public) aspect – the **manifestation**. It is not true that "all" will be changed at the manifestation for, as noted above, people on earth during the millennial kingdom will be in physical bodies. Children will be born during this time, something not possible for those in spiritual bodies (Ezekiel 47.22, Zechariah 10.8). **v.52:** The transformation of

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<sup>1</sup> The insertion of "the Lord" [from heaven] as in the KJV is likely an addition made in order to explain the nature of "the man from heaven." Most early manuscripts have "the second man is from heaven" [JND, RV, ESV & NET].

our bodies at the rapture will be instantaneous. "In a moment" [*átomos*], from which we take the word 'atom', describes something *uncut* or *indivisible* because of its smallness. This is the smallest conceivable amount of time – a split second! In Jewish thought, the "twinkling of an eye" was an expression equated with an atom of time. The word "twinkling" refers to any *rapid* motion such as a *fling* or *throw* and is better compared to the casting of a glance than the blinking of an eye. The "last trump" does not equate to the last trumpet of Revelation or the memorial of blowing of trumpets (Leviticus 23.24) – those trumpets close the Tribulation and gather Israel from the four winds. This is the "last" trumpet in the sense that it concludes the *day of grace* and closes God's dealings with the Church. Note. God's programme for Israel is also closed by a trumpet (Revelation 11.15). The most likely allusion here is to the *three* trumpets of the Roman army. The *first* caused every man to spring from sleep and awake to duty, dismantling their tents. The *second* was a call to stand and be ready to march like runners in a race. The *third* (and *last*) was the signal for departure, to urge and ensure no man was out of his place in the rank. When Christ comes for His own, not one will be missing from the ranks! Note. Paul did not know whether he would fall into the category of 'alive and remain' (as here, v.52) or the 'dead in Christ' to be raised at His coming (cf. 6.14; 2 Corinthians 4.14). Nevertheless, he faithfully *lived* and *laboured* in light of the imminent return of Christ.

**v.53:** Paul explains why such a transformation is essential, viewing things *before* the change (v.53) and *after* the change (v.54). The verb "put on" is metaphorical of putting on a garment, the *aorist* signifying the momentary character of the event. Thus, the *rags* of corruption (subject to *decay*) and mortality (subject to *death*) that adorn this natural body must be put off and replaced by the *splendid* robes of *incorruption* and *immortality* in a spiritual body. **v.54:** When the transformation has taken place at the rapture, "the saying that is written" (Isaiah 25.8) will be "brought to pass". The NET of Isaiah 25.8 reads, "*He will swallow up death permanently. The sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from every face.*" In Canaanite mythology, death was viewed as a hungry enemy that swallows its victims. Now the LORD swallows all trace of death and its operations. Death will no longer touch the people of God. Death will then be 'drowned' (cf. Hebrews 11.29, which uses the same Greek word) or 'engulfed' (absorbed) *into* or resulting in, complete victory. The proper context of Isaiah 25 describes conditions in the millennium when blessing will flow from Zion to the nations of the world, including longevity of life and the absence of infant mortality. But, what in Isaiah had special reference to Israel, finds even greater fulness of meaning here.

**v.55:** In a further reference to the OT, Paul quotes from Hosea 13.14. Though there is a textual difficulty in Hosea, it seems as if there is a sudden departure from the threat of judgment on Ephraim (Israel) to "*a momentary glimpse of a future national redemption... Death and the grave would be destroyed and there would be a glorious resurrection of the nation*" (Jim Flanigan). Paul makes the application to believers of the church age, perhaps placing these words as a song of victory in the mouths of every saint. Note. Many translations reverse the *order* of the questions and make death the subject of both. "*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?*" (NET). The word "sting" describes anything by which a puncture wound is made, probably equated here with the venomous sting of a scorpion or serpent. But death is now like a serpent without fangs, or a scorpion without a stinger – it is altogether helpless to inflict any damage. This statement may be the song of those who are alive at the coming of the Lord. They will never know the sting of death. The second statement (in the AV) could be the song of the saints who are raised. Death is apparently triumphant as long as the bodies of the saints repose in death. But death has lost its "victory"! Now, in a single moment, death is forced to yield its victims; it is well and truly spoiled! Cf. Revelation 20.13. **v.56:** God has not only dealt with the *effect*, death, but also the *root cause*, sin and a broken law. From the future victorious song of the saints, Paul reminds us that now "the sting of death is sin". Death is not simply the natural consequence of being human, it is the result of a deadly poison called sin (Romans 5.12). Sin causes death. It is the sting which death has used to pierce human nature and inflict its deadly purpose. In addition, sin's "strength" (power) is "the law". The Law of God declares a set of divine standards which *crystallise* what sin is and pronounce *condemnation* upon all those who fail to meet its demands (Romans 4.15, 5.13; 2 Corinthians 3.6). Leon Morris notes, "*By setting before us the standard we ought to reach and never do, it [the Law] becomes sin's stronghold. It makes sinners of us all. It condemns us all.*" **v.57:** But thanks be to God! Christ has borne death's sting, the sin and condemnation that was ours. He has fully and comprehensively dealt with sin at Calvary and thus removed the fear of death for the believer. The basis has been laid for the vanquishing of death. So, we *presently* enjoy victory over sin and the condemnation of the Law **now** (cf. Romans 7.24-25) and *will* enjoy final and eternal victory over death when Christ returns. God has wrought all this through our Lord Jesus Christ.

**v.58:** "Therefore" or 'so then' draws a strong practical exhortation from the entire chapter. *Since* Christ is alive from the dead and has guaranteed our eternal destiny, *since* there is life after death, *since* there is the prospect of recompense, *since* our preaching is not in vain (v.14), then labour for Christ (and the hazarding of life it brings, v.30) is not pathetic but the least we must do. "Beloved brethren" (cf. 16.24) shows that, despite their many failings and follies, the apostle's affection for them all was undiminished. "Be ye" or 'become ye' suggests they had not yet become or proved themselves to be what Paul enjoins upon them. They were to be:

- **Committed to Truth.** The word “steadfast” comes from a word meaning ‘to sit’. Metaphorically, it describes something not subject to *change* or *variation*, or a person who is *settled* and *fixed* in thinking or behaviour. This is likely an encouragement to stand firm in the truth of resurrection and the preaching of the gospel. The additional “unmoveable” has the same basic idea but with more *intensity*. It describes what is totally immobile and motionless. The Corinthians must adhere firmly to the faith and any attempts to turn them from its truth.
- **Consumed by Duty.** The phrase “always abounding” describes what is excelling, overflowing and abundant (cf. Ephesians 1.8). Believers should ‘exceed requirements’ in spiritual work and labour for the Lord. If we are living for *heaven* (not earth), and *eternity* (not time) we must be diligent, untiring workers, determined to ‘overdo’ ourselves in service of the one to whom we owe everything. MacArthur says, *“Reasonable rest is important and necessary. But if we err, Paul is saying, it should be on the side of doing more work for the Lord, not less. Leisure and relaxation are two great modern idols, to which many Christians seem quite willing to bow down. In proper proportion recreation and diversions can help restore our energy and increase our effectiveness. But they also can easily become ends in themselves, demanding more and more of our attention, concern, time, and energy. More than one believer has relaxed and hobbled himself completely out of the work of the Lord.”*
- **Controlled by the Lord.** But we do not exhaust ourselves in *any* and *every* conceivable toil. We are engaged in the “work of the Lord” and labour “in the Lord” – that is, work in His cause and under the direction of His authority and control. WE Vine distinguishes between ‘work of the Lord’ and ‘work for the Lord’. He says, *“Much may be done for Him which we imagine to be service rendered to Him, but which is not conformed to His will and therefore is not His work in reality. The motive may be sincere and the activity constant, but we need to be sure that what is done is according to the Scriptures of truth.”*
- **Commended in Eternity.** All is done with the full assurance that our “labour” (toil resulting in weariness) is “not in vain”. Nothing done for Christ is *meaningless*, *worthless* or *wasted*. It will bear fruit *now* and earn the commendation of the Lord in eternity (Hebrews 6.10). Remember, labour is the *test* of love (1 Thessalonians 1.3).