

## 1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-49

### INTRODUCTION

Now up to this point in this chapter Paul has been dealing with one issue concerning the resurrection. Some of the Corinthians who had accepted the truth of Christ's resurrection had refused to believe in a general resurrection of the dead. Paul in verses 12-34 exposed the dangers of holding to such a belief. However now Paul turns his attention to another matter related to the general resurrection of the dead. That is how a general resurrection is possible?

The idea of resurrection of the entire human race seems inconceivable because of the complexity and the power demanded to accomplish it (v 35).

The question is this how could God possibly resemble the bodies of everyone who has ever died throughout the history of the world? Another question being raised was that if such bodies are raised what kind of body do they have? In verses 36-49 Paul answers these questions in four ways.

#### 1. AN ILLUSTRATION FROM NATURE (vs. 36-38)

Paul calls those people who raise such questions as "foolish" meaning that they lack real understanding. To show how foolish they were in their thinking Paul gives an illustration from nature. In three significant ways resurrection is similar to the planting and growth of seeds in that the original form and the final forms are different in kind yet there is continuity between the two. Resurrection is not impossible because it happens in a small way within the plant world.

First there must be a dying of the seed. The seed decomposes and that seed must cease to exist in its original form before it can come to life in its final form as a plant (v 36). In the same way before Christ could bear the fruit of salvation for us he had to die (John 12:24). Likewise before we can participate in the fruit of resurrection we too must die.

However in both the growing of crops from seed and in the general resurrection of the dead there is a difference between the original and final forms. The seed loses its identity as a seed and becomes more and more like a mature plant. But the seed itself that you sow whether it is of wheat or something else looks nothing like the mature plant. Only after ceasing to be seed does it become the mature plant that the farmer harvests (v 37). So it is with the resurrection. When Jesus was raised from the dead his glorified body was different from the one, which died. What came out of the grave was different from what was placed in the grave. It was no longer limited to time space and material substance.

During Jesus appearances after the resurrection he appeared in one place or another without physically having to travel to those places. He appeared and disappeared at will and entered rooms without opening doors (Luke 24:15, 31, 36; John 20:19). In his earthly body Jesus had not been able to do any of those things. Resurrection changed Jesus body in marvellous and radical ways and at his return all resurrected bodies will be changed likewise.

However in spite of the differences there is nevertheless continuity between the old and the new. The seed changes radically but it continues as the same life form. A wheat seed does not become barley. In the same way after Jesus was raised from the dead no one recognised him unless he revealed himself to them. But once he was revealed then he was recognisable.

The disciples knew his face was familiar and they recognised his wounded side and his pieced hands. In similar ways our resurrected bodies as believers will have continuity with the bodies we have now. Our physical bodies will die one day and they will be changed and our resurrected

bodies will be different but they will still be our bodies. Surely it is not too hard to believe that the God who has worked this process out in nature can do so when it comes to our own resurrection.

## 2. THE FORM OF THE RESURRECTION BODY (vs. 39-42)

These verses expand on Paul's previous point that our resurrection bodies will be different from our earthly bodies. Seeing the vast differences in God's creation, we should not question His ability to create bodies that are different and yet continuous. God has made an amazing variety of earthly bodies. All we need to do is look around us to see the infinite assortment of created beings with all their variety.

In the biological world the bodies of people is absolutely distinct from the bodies of animals, or birds or fish (v 39) no matter what evolution claims. Even within the animal, bird and fish kingdoms there is such a rich variety, with many different types of bodies within their own kingdom. There are no two exactly alike and that is just how it is with human beings as well, there is such a rich variety among us and there is no one who is exactly alike not even identical twins are exactly identical.

But even though there is a tremendous amount of variety among the various species and among human beings each animal, fish, bird and human being stays within its own kind. We will never change into another form of life and that is one of the greatest arguments against evolution. There is simply no evidence of an animal becoming a fish or a bird becoming an animal.

Likewise there is no evidence that animals become human beings. There is of course change within its own species but it is impossible for it to change to a totally different life form.

Then if we look into space and look at the heavenly bodies (v 40) which of course differ from the earthly bodies in nature manifestation and form. But they are not only different from the earthly bodies with all their rich variety but they are also different from one another. The sun is greatly different from the moon and both are different from the stars (v 41). From astronomy we know that many of what normally are called stars are actually planets and therefore similar to the earth and the moon and that true stars are themselves suns. But Paul is speaking here from the perspective of normal human observation and not from the perspective of science. From either perspective however his basic point is true.

The stars generate their own light while the planets and moons only reflect light produced by the stars. In that way the two types of heavenly bodies are greatly different in glory that is, in character and manifestation. Even within the stars there is a great variety. Each star I am told is different just as every plant and animal and human being is different (v 41).

God has infinite creative capacity including the capacity to make infinite variety. Therefore why would anyone think it is hard for God to resurrect human bodies no matter how they died or how long they have been dead? Now here is Paul's application from his science lesson (v 42).

Resurrection bodies will differ from earthly bodies and resurrection bodies will be as individual and unique as are all the other forms of God's creation.

## 3. THE CONTRASTS OF RESURRECTION (v 42b-44)

Paul now focuses directly on the resurrection body. He mentions specific ways in which our glorified resurrected body will be different from our physical earthly body. He does this by way of contrasts.

**a) Perishable and Imperishable (v 42)** - The first contrasts focuses on durability. One of the most obvious observations about human life is that it is perishable. We are all subject to deterioration

with age and eventually we will all die unless the Lord returns. In fact from the day of our birth the process of deterioration and death has begun.

As we get older even the healthiest person gets weaker and is prone to more health problems. Eventually death and even more rapid decay will come our way; our physical bodies are perishable, they are subject to decay. However the resurrected body of the believer will be raised imperishable. Our new bodies will not know decay or sickness or deterioration or even death it will be perfectly united to our new heavenly conditions. This is why we should all be looking forward to it. In this world we might suffer greatly, we might face a painful death but one day our bodies will be raised never to die again. They are raised never to decay. No wonder we ought to look forward to the resurrection day.

**b) Dishonour and Glory (v 43)** - This contrast has to do with potential. At the fall mankind's potential for pleasing and serving God was radically reduced. Our minds and wills and bodies became incapable of doing what God designed them to do. We were created perfect, made in God's image and therefore made to manifest our creator in all that we do. But through sin instead of honouring God we became characterised by dishonour.

We dishonour God by abusing and misusing the bodies that he has given us, for he desires that we serve and honour him with our bodies (Romans 12:1). Even the most faithful believer dies with his body in a state of dishonour a state of imperfection.

But the good news is that the imperfect and dishonoured body one-day will be raised in glory. Throughout eternity our new immortal bodies will also be honourable bodies, perfected for pleasing; praising and enjoying our creator who made us redeemed us and has restored us.

In heaven we will have reached our full potential the very purpose for which we were made will be reached in that glorious day when our bodies are raised in glory. Perhaps in this world we are frustrated and ashamed that we seem unable to obey our God. Because Christ has redeemed us we long to follow Him and we want to bring glory and honour to Him. But so often we find ourselves bringing dishonour to his name and we find ourselves in rebellion and disobedience.

O we want to do well and obey him but we find ourselves doing the very things we don't want to do. Paul found that to be true about himself as well (Romans 7:7-25). But praise God that one day we will be raised in glory and will be able to do exactly as we want to do, we will obey and love our God for all eternity and will not be frustrated by our sin and disobedience.

We might find ourselves dishonouring him now but one day we will glorify him. We have some future to look forward too.

**c) Weakness and Power (v 43)** - This contrast has to do with ability. Our present bodies are characterised by weakness. We are weak not only in physical strength but also in resistance to disease and harm and sin. None of us is immune from breaking bones or from catching various infections and eventually we will become so weak that we will die. Our human bodies are temporary and they are fragile. But this is not the case with our new resurrected bodies, which will be raised in power, which probably means a power to do what we ought to do and desire to do. In other words what our spirits determine our new resurrected bodies will be able to accomplish. It will not be subject to the process of ageing and to the effects of sin.

In this world we long to be free from our sin and from all the pain and distresses that a weak fragile human body brings upon us. Well the good news is that one day we will be free, free from sin, free from pain and distress, free from frustrations, free from limitations and we will have all the power we need to live freely and happily and obediently for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

On that resurrection day our body and soul will be united in power to live in perfect communion with our God. There will be no more weakness' to endure but we will be able to finally do what we

long to do and worship our God in the way that we have longed to do while we lived in our natural bodies.

**d) Natural and Spiritual (v 44)** - This final contrast has to do with the realm of existence. Our physical bodies are strictly natural, it can only live and function in our created world. Our bodies are made for living life on earth but our new resurrected bodies will be perfectly suited for living in our heavenly home. Therefore in eternity everything about us will be perfected for all eternity.

We will be perfectly equipped in body and soul to live life in our new heavenly world worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ who died in order that we could be in our heavenly home. Then our desire to be perfect will be realised.

#### **4. THE PROTOTYPE OF RESURRECTION (vs. 45-49).**

The final way in which Paul answers the question how are the dead raised and with what kind of body (v 35) is by showing the prototype of resurrection and by further explaining the differences between natural and spiritual bodies. Paul reminds us that at the beginning Adam was created by God with a natural body but it was a perfect body suitable for Adam's earthly situation.

If Adam had of remained perfect and not given in to temptation then he would have lived perfectly forever with his natural body. The last Adam is clearly referring to Jesus Christ and if we inherit our natural bodies through Adam then Paul is teaching us that we inherit our resurrected bodies our spiritual bodies through Christ. Adam was the prototype of our natural bodies whereas Christ is the prototype for our resurrected bodies.

However in verse 46 Paul points out the obvious the natural came first not the spiritual body. Every human being starts by inheriting through Adam a natural body, a body that originally came from the dust of the ground (v 47 cf. Genesis 2:7). In every way Adam and his descendants are earthly. However Christ who is the second Adam produced a spiritual race through his death and resurrection.

Christ was different from Adam for he did not come from the dust of the ground but from heaven and took upon Himself a natural body like every other human being. But He did so to identify with us and to die for us and to give us spiritual life.

Therefore although every believer is linked to Adam and is therefore subject to the limitations of our natural bodies we are also united to Christ by faith in his death and resurrection and therefore we inherit a resurrection body just like Christ's. This means that one-day our earthly body, which is, like Adam's will be changed into a heavenly body like Christ's. Every Christian is linked to Adam but every Christian is united to Christ, as Adam is from the earth so we know the limitations and frustrations of living on this earth. But as Christ is from heaven so one day we will know the joys and blessings of living in heaven, just as we are like Adam now then we will be like Christ then.

We cannot image what that will be like, even our present spiritual eyes cannot fully comprehend our future resurrection bodies and what they will be like or what it will be like living with them in God's new heaven and new earth. But although we cannot understand we must surely look forward to that day with great excitement and anticipation.

But that resurrection day should be our motivation for living for Christ now in this world with all its limitations because of sin and because we are in our natural bodies. We must remember that whatever happens to our natural bodies in this world whether they are healthy or sick, strong or weak, whether we live for a short time or a long time, whether we endure pain or comfort they are not our permanent bodies.

Those of us who know the pain and weaknesses and frailty of age or disability or illness must remember that our blessed hope and assurance is that our natural earthly bodies will one day be

raised as spiritual bodies. Although we only have a little glimpse of what those resurrected bodies will be like we must ultimately remember that we are told that we will be like Christ, which is all we really need to know.

One day we will be like our Saviour and will worship Him and adore Him and love Him and serve Him in ways that we can only image and dream about while we live in our earthly bodies. We have a bright future, one that will make all the problems and concerns and pain of this world seem so insignificant compared to the glories that await us.

Therefore let us do what we are encouraged to do by Paul in the book of Colossians

“Since then we have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. (Colossians 3:1-2)

Amen