

## ***"How are the Dead Raised?"***

1 Corinthians 15:35-49

Today we are going to ponder a question that Paul poses in 1 Corinthians 15:35:

35 But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?"

Paul probably isn't voicing an honest question; he's reflecting an attitude of ridicule about the idea of a bodily resurrection. One strand of Greek philosophy (later known as Gnosticism) taught that the immaterial is good and that the material/physical is bad. With that mindset, the goal of religion is to *free* a person from the physical/material. And so the idea of living eternally in a body was ridiculous to some. The question Paul will address is, "How is it possible that the dead are raised? What kind of bodies would people even have?"

We may not think about a bodily resurrection with ridicule, but we certainly have our questions about the topic, don't we. Haven't you thought, "How can it be that a person's body is placed in the ground – perhaps for hundreds or thousands of years – and is then reanimated?" Or, "What about people who die at sea or people who are cremated and whose ashes are scattered? Does God gather up all of their molecules and reconstitute a new body for them?" Or, "What about people who are cremated and whose ashes are then scattered in some way?" How is it possible that the dead are raised?

This is a confusing issue to ponder. Paul's response to this issue is insightful. Beginning in verse 36 Paul uses a series of analogies from creation to illustrate that a bodily resurrection is completely consistent with common things that we accept without question.

***God is fully capable of giving us glorious resurrection bodies (analogies from creation). (15:36-44a)*** In answer to the question, "How can it be that the dead are raised?" Paul replies:

36 You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; 37 and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else.

In effect, when you put a seed in the ground, it has to die before it "comes to life" (i.e., before it spouts, grows, and yields produce; Jesus used this same imagery in John 12:24). Paul has us think of a seed as a "body"; he also has us think of the plant that grows as another "body" (Paul calls it "the body which is to be"). Paul points out that you don't plant "the body which is to be" (the plant) in the ground. Rather, you plant bare grain or the seed. The body that you put into the ground and which dies is very different than the body which eventually grows.

Paul refers to "bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of *something else*." The "something else" he had in mind could well have been . . . okra. (If you haven't already, you should plant your okra ASAP; it grows like a weed here in Kansas.) This is an okra seed, the body you sow.



This is the okra plant, “the body which is to be”:



There is continuity between the body which is put in the ground and “the body which is to be.” There is also discontinuity: the two are very different from each other. Paul will use this simple observation in describing the continuity and discontinuity between the body that is put in the ground and the body that is resurrected.

Paul brings God into view when he writes:

38 But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own.

Paul will repeatedly assert that **God** is the one who gives bodies – to plants, to animals, to planets and stars, **and** to people. Here Paul reminds them that the same God gives one type of body to the okra plant “just as He wished,” and that God gives a different type of body to the okra seed. Again, Paul is establishing that there is precedent for God giving one type of body to something that dies and God giving a very different body to the same thing when it comes back to life.

In verse 39 Paul points out that the animal kingdom displays many different types of bodies – all given by God:

39 All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish.



Can we agree that “all flesh is not the same”? God has the capacity to give different types of bodies to different creatures. In verse 40 Paul turns to the heavens to illustrate the point further:

40 There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another.

Again, there are huge differences between “heavenly bodies” and “earthly bodies”; they have two different types of glory. “Glory” is a rich, biblical concept. Glory refers to “weightiness” or “what makes something impressive” (Thiselton, p. 1270). The glory of heavenly bodies is different from the glory of the earth; they are impressive in different ways. The “glory” of a galaxy vs. that of the Grand Canyon and the Konza Prairie:



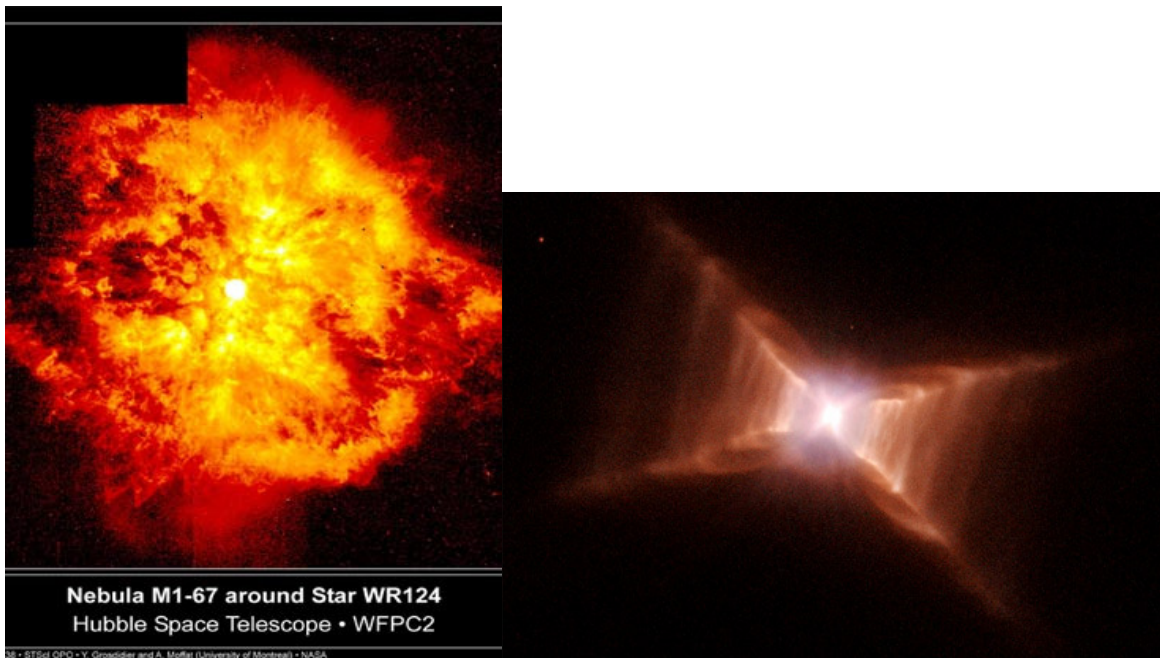


The glory of the heavens is altogether different than the glory of the earth.

In verse 41 Paul points out that even among heavenly bodies, there are different kinds of glory:

41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

Different heavenly bodies have different kinds of glory:



They are impressive in different ways. And God made them all.

Are you ready for the point of all these observations? Here it is:

42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. . . .

All these observations apply to the resurrection of the dead. Paul specifically applies the observation that one type of body is “sown” in the ground and another is resurrected. There’s continuity between the body that is put in the ground and the one that is resurrected, but there’s also great discontinuity:

42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body;

We use the term “perishable” to describe foods that “go bad” if you don’t keep them refrigerated. I had a roommate in college that didn’t realize that tuna fish is perishable; he ate half a can of tuna, put the rest in a container and put it in the cupboard. After a week or so it was obvious that tuna is perishable. Well, our bodies are perishable; they last for a while, but they eventually go bad (we eventually die physically). A body that is put in the ground is “sown a perishable body”; but “it is raised an imperishable body.” Our resurrected bodies will never go bad. They aren’t subject to death and decay in any way. They are that different from our earthly bodies.

43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;

Paul gets at this same idea in Philippians 3:21 when he writes that Christ “will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” Our earthly bodies – even the best of them – are lowly/dishonorable compared to what they’ll be in the resurrection. Remember that Paul has already established that God is really good at giving glory to different types of bodies (earthly and heavenly). Our bodies will be raised glorious – just like Jesus’ resurrected body. We’ll talk about this more next week.

We’ve all been humbled by the “weakness” inherent in our earthly bodies. Anybody here tired or exhausted? Chances are that somebody near you is asleep right now . . . Anybody gotten sick lately? Anybody ever been so exhausted that you felt like you were shutting down? That’s the human condition in earthly bodies. We get tired and sick and exhausted; we need doctors and medicine and rest. Our earthly bodies are “sown in weakness.”

The good news is that our bodies will be “raised in power.” This, of course, will be the power of God coursing through our bodies and our souls. Our bodies will be perfectly suited to experience the power of God. There will be nothing in us that inhibits the power of God. Notice the last contrast:

44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. . . .

Our earthly bodies are “natural” but our resurrected bodies will be “spiritual.” We need to think carefully at this point. When Paul says “spiritual” he doesn’t mean “immaterial”; we will not be ghosts. Our resurrected bodies will be like Christ’s resurrected body. We know from the Gospels that it was a material body: people could see it and touch it; Jesus could eat (not because He had to but because He wanted to). We know from the Gospels that Jesus’ body was distinctly His: it bore the marks of the crucifixion; there was continuity between the body that was put into the grave and the body that was resurrected. We also know that Jesus’ body wasn’t subject to the normal limitations of earthly bodies: He could enter a room even when the doors were shut (John 20:26). Those are characteristics of Jesus’ spiritual, resurrected body.

Again, if God can give Jesus that type of resurrected body, He can do the same for us. Paul is impressing upon us that God is fully capable of giving us glorious resurrection bodies. He’s proven His capability in creation and in Jesus.

But there might remain a lingering doubt about whether or not God would actually do this for me. You might think, “I’m pretty sure He’d do this for the Apostle Paul and the Apostle John and Billy Graham; but I’m not so sure He’d ever make *me* glorious.” Ever thought that? I have. But what we see in the next few verses is that *God guarantees glorious resurrected bodies to all who are “in Christ.” (15:44b-49)*

In the middle of verse 44 Paul changes gears. He is no longer merely arguing that there’s precedent for different beings having different types of bodies. He begins arguing that a resurrected spiritual body is a necessity for those who are in Christ. Our salvation is so comprehensive that it will extend not merely to our souls, but also to our bodies. Notice how Paul makes this point:

44 . . . If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 45 So also it is written, “The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

In verse 45 Paul is making reference to Genesis 2:7 which reads:

7 Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

The first man, Adam, had a natural body like our bodies. The last Adam, Jesus Christ, by contrast “became a life-giving spirit.” This is probably a reference to Jesus’ resurrection existence. Whereas Jesus was always a spiritual being, after the resurrection, his spirituality extended even to His body. As our Savior; Jesus gives life to all who trust in Him. By virtue of His death and resurrection He “became a life-giving spirit.”

46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. 47 The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven.

The first man, Adam, had a natural body, made from the earth. The second man, Jesus, has a spiritual body from heaven.

So far so good, but what does this have to do with us? Why does it matter that Jesus has a spiritual, heavenly body? Paul makes an argument from the principle of corporate solidarity: if you are “in Adam” (if you are one of his descendents), the things that were true of him are true of you; and if you are “in Christ” (if you belong to Him), what is true of Him is also true of you. This is Paul’s point in verses 48 and 49:

48 As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. 49 Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

Just as we have earthly bodies by virtue of the fact that we are “in Adam,” so too we will also have spiritual, heavenly bodies by virtue of the fact that we are in Christ. A glorious resurrection body is not a bonus prize for a select few (i.e. those who are REALLY holy); it is a guarantee for *all* who are in Christ. Whatever happened to Jesus happens to those who are in Jesus. Just as we have “borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.”



You may be thinking, “So what?” Why does it matter that we know that we’re going to be raised in glorious spiritual bodies? Next week we’ll see that there’s a very practical application for us; we’ll see in verse 58 that the guarantee of a resurrected body means that what we do here in these bodies matters – it’s not for nothing. But that’s next week. This week I want to answer the question, “So what?” by pointing out a couple of things that our resurrection tells us about God. After all, the Bible is about God. So let’s notice a couple of things that this passage reminds us about God – especially in relation to how He relates to His people.

First, ***God loves us more than we can imagine.*** Our eventual resurrection is not some mechanical action that God is obligated to perform on our behalf. No, our resurrection is yet another expression of God’s deep love for us. When God conceived of our salvation in eternity past, he purposed that He would love us to the fullest extent. He loves us so much that He is not only going to take away everything hurtful and destructive in our lives; He is positively going to make us glorious – impressive in a way that we can’t even imagine. Again, this is not something God does grudgingly because He *has* to because we somehow snuck into the Kingdom. God does this joyfully and graciously because He wants to.

Second, this passage reminds us that ***God is serious about transforming us into the likeness of Jesus Christ.*** We should understand our future bodily resurrection in connection with everything else we know about our salvation. The resurrection is only the last step in God’s process of transforming us into the likeness of Jesus Christ. God always finishes what He begins. And that includes the transformation He’s begun in the lives of His children. Paul wrote in Philippians 3:20-21:

20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

God’s commitment to transforming us into the likeness of Jesus extends all the way to transforming our humble/weak bodies into conformity with His glorious resurrected body. This should give us great confidence that God is serious about our transformation.

And this should give us great encouragement about our ongoing transformation in this life. Sometimes we look at our lives and wonder if we’ll ever change. We see our impatience, our anger, our fears, our lusts, our insecurities, our apathy, etc. So often we feel stuck in our sinful habits. Thank God that the Christian life isn’t about our ability to get ourselves unstuck. It’s about God’s ability to transform us into the image of Jesus Christ. Yes, we actively participate in this transformation, but we have to know that God is the One who will accomplish it. The fact that God who will one day transform us bodily into the image of Jesus should remind us that God is serious about our progressive transformation in this life. Bring to mind an area of your life that needs to be transformed. Look at that area of your life in light of what God will one day make you. If God can transform you bodily into the likeness of Jesus, know that God can transform this area of your life. Because of His fierce love for you, God is serious about progressively conforming you into the image of Christ. And that should give you encouragement.