

“Ministry Diversity and the Centrality of Christ in the Local Assembly”
Issues of Theology - Understanding the Resurrection

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Title: “From Grime to Glory”
Text: 1 Corinthians 15:35-49
Theme: How the idea of resurrection works and what it looks like are answered.

The present danger:

Because of our immediate context, we often lose sight of the resurrection. It is the urgent that presses us into its stifling hold. We are blinded to the glories of heaven and deaf to the sweet music of the eternal. We are robbed of rest and contentment by the thieves of the urgent and convenient. **Our ignorance of resurrection truth must not diminish or tarnish the spectacular nature of it.**

The idea that Christian faith makes life easier is a false theology. Just because you are a Christian does not guarantee that you will have fewer problems and less worry. In fact just the opposite might be true. Although there is a penetration of the eternal into the temporal, there is still an eternal that is mind blowing.

The eternal view:

For the believing, the grave is to hold no fear. What awaits the believer after death is life indescribable. We say to the dying, this perishable will give way to the imperishable, this dishonorable will give way to glory, this weakness will give way to power, and this natural will give way to the spiritual. This is what waits to embrace you with open and welcoming arms.

Introduction:

Paul begins verse 35 with one of the strongest ways of showing a contrasting idea. The questions asked in our present passage address the challenge of resurrection truth as to how and what. This is the question begging to be asked. If there is a resurrection, how will it happen and what will it look like? It would seem that resurrection of the dead seems impossible until one recognizes that the God who resurrects the dead is the God who creates all things. **If He can bring life from dust, He can bring life from death.**

Verse 36 is Paul’s sharp response, “You fool!”

“...its bluntness makes clear Paul’s view of the worthlessness of such arguments.” (Leon Morris, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, 223).

“The questions mentioned in verse 35 were not those of someone who wanted to know but were the mocking taunts of someone who thought he already knew.” (John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, 433).

“The word was used derisively of one who does not use or does not have understanding.” (John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, 433). It can be translated “mindless” or “stupid.”

The gospel:

Any denial of the resurrection from the dead is a denial of the good news found in Jesus Christ. If you deny the resurrection, then I call upon you to listen and may the Holy Spirit give you understanding.

Paul appears to draw a sharp line in the sand. His response almost communicates a frustration with those who still challenge a resurrection from the grave. The deniers challenge the resurrection by asking two questions: how does this happen and what does this look like?

Why am I teaching this?

- Know - The text wants us to know that life will come from death and glory from dishonor.
- Choose - The text wants us to choose life in Christ as the fulfillment of His promises to us.
- Feel - The text wants us to feel the freedom, joy, and rest that comes from knowing our future resurrection through death to life.

How will they best hear – what does this truth “feel” like?

Few of us have had the “joy” of bailing hay on a hot, sticky day. The idea of having hay clinging to my sweaty body does not fill me with any kind of delight. However, all of us have experienced the idea of feeling just plain yucky. Where all we wanted was a shower, food, and sleep. Presently we exist in the “yucky” place and what God holds out before us in the resurrection is that hot shower, the delicious meal, and rest-filled sleep. It is knowing that the shower and meal await us is what propels us to endure in the midst of the “yucky.”

Paul goes about answering the two questions in explaining the resurrection by using two comparisons. The first is a comparison to the natural world, and the second is a comparison to the spiritual world. We will begin where Paul does with “an explanation of the resurrection by comparisons from the natural world” (vv. 35-44).

- I. An explanation of the resurrection by comparisons from the natural world (vv. 35-44).

THE BIG IDEA – The nature of the resurrection has a distinct blueprint that occurs on a smaller scale continuously in the natural world.

ILLUSTRATION:

What is meant by nature or character? Nature or character is what we use to describe something. If I say it . . .

- Barks
- Has four legs
- A wet nose and
- A wagging tail

You would rightly conclude that I am speaking of a dog. This is equally true when we speak of the “nature” of the resurrection.

If I say . . .

- Life comes out of death (v. 36)
- It is sown in hope of what will be, not what is (v. 37)
- What it becomes, is based on what it was (vv. 38-39)
- Each kind serves its God given purpose (vv. 40-41).

You would rightly conclude that I am speaking of the resurrection.

“The foolishness of the critic was caused by a failure to observe some of the principles underlying the growth of living plants.” (Robert G. Gromacki, Called to be Saints: An Exposition of 1 Corinthians, 192).

A. The Illustration (vv. 36-41)

1. Life comes out of death (v. 36)

Notice how Paul responds to the mockers. He uses the simplest of illustrations to prove his point. Everything around you from the natural world confirms the nature of resurrection.

“Condition of third class, possibility assumed. This is the answer to the ‘how’ question. In plant life death precedes life, death of the seed and then the new plant.” (A.T. Robertson’s Word Pictures)

Unless you die, you will not be resurrected. Some, perhaps, were arguing that the resurrection was already past, but Paul’s statement clarifies whether or not a resurrection happened.

2. It is sown in hope of what will be, not what is (v. 37)

The resurrection is more than what this life is.

3. What it becomes, is based on what it was (vv. 38-39)

Although there will be significant and glorious alterations to what we are, what we are in our material and immaterial makeup is retained. We will be recognizable and identifiable in our resurrected bodies. We are not swallowed

up into a generic non-descript mass of unidentifiable humanity. There is continuity between what we are and in what we will become.

ILLUSTRATION:

To get apples you have to sow apples. Apples come from apples. This is equally true concerning our resurrected bodies.

We can never become something other than what we are.

“No matter what we may eat, no matter how specialized or unbalanced our diet may be, and no matter what our environment may be, we will never change into another form of life. We may become healthier or more sickly, heavier or lighter, but we will never be anything but a human being and never any human being but the one we are.” (John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, 435).

This is one of the strongest evidences against evolution.

As a sidebar in verse 38,

“The present tense for ‘gives’ shows that God actively and daily determines the life cycle of plants. The aorist tense for ‘pleased’ shows that He acts according to His plan devised in eternity past.” (Robert G. Gromacki, Called to be Saints: An Exposition of 1 Corinthians, 193).

4. Each kind serves its God given purpose (vv. 40-41).

The glory of creation is like a grand symphony, whereby each part plays to the combined and greater glory of God.

- a. heavenly
- b. earthly
- c. sun
- d. moon
- e. stars

Each piece combined radiates the summing up of all things in Christ.

“God has infinite creative capacity, including the capacity to make infinite variety. Why would anyone think it hard for Him to re-create and resurrect human bodies, no matter what the form might be? (John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, 435).

B. The Application (vv. 42-44)

Here Paul tells us what this means.

“Paul mentions specific ways, given as four sets of contrasts, in which our glorified bodies will be different from our earthly bodies.” (John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, 436).

1. Perishable to imperishable (v. 42)

There is coming a day when my diseased death embracing body will give way to glorious immortality.

“The first contrast pertains to durability.” (John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, 436).

2. Dishonor to glory (v. 43a)

We will see the weight of this statement in verse 49.

3. Weakness to power (v. 43b)

All of the physical limitations placed on us by our physical fallen bodies will have been removed. We will be fully human.

“The third contrast has to do with ability.” (John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, 437).

4. Natural to spiritual (v. 44a)

“The body which we now have is one suited to life on the level of the soul, the psyche (cf. 2:14). But the resurrection body will be one suited to life lived on the level of the spirit. Our present body is for the earth and suited to habitation on the earth. Our resurrection body will be fashioned after the pattern of the Lord from heaven and suited to a life in heaven.” (James L. Boyer, For a World Like Ours, NTS, 144)

“The fourth area of contrasts has to do with the sphere, or realm, of existence.” (John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, 438).

When God raises us from the dead we will have an existence that is imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual. This is what awaits us.

Many people refuse to face the reality of their immediate existence. Questions such as “who am I, why am I here, and where am I headed” are quietly and conveniently skirted. We live in a state of persistent denial. My present existence and circumstances, however, are non-negotiable. I do not have to look far to see that something is very wrong with the air I breathe, the ground I trod, and the context in which I live my life. I am marked by corruption and decay. I am perishing. Because of the fall into sin and the imputation of Adam’s sin to my nature, I am vile and shame-filled. My frame is frail. I have broken my wrist, nose, and knuckles. I have two 2” stainless steel screws in my left ankle. I have had concussions to my head and arthroscopic surgery on my left knee (or was it my right knee [my mind is also failing]) and I have had a cervical laminectomy on my C4, C5, and C6 vertebrae. My body is failing. It is

diseased. I am not getting physically stronger or better. I am not like fine wine, but a fish out of water . . . gasping and rotting. I am fragile whereby back slaps and hard hugs are unsettling. I am of Adam and of the earth. I am natural. This reality is not really open to debate. All of us at all times share in this marred way of life.

Yet . . . ah yes, yet, what a powerful word. The word “yet” opens the door to greater opportunity and hope. There is yet, despite my present condition, another page to be turned, another chapter to be read, another book to be written. The storyline continues. It moves from the present and into the future. There is coming a day of promise whereby God will fulfill His words to me.

The promise of God tells me that I will exchange this perishable for imperishable. I will give up dishonor and inherit glory. I will replace weakness with power and the natural body for a spiritual body. Oh what a day of unbridled celebration this will be. Such words sustain me in my descent into death and birth me into my new life. This time is not the final word, sentence, paragraph, chapter, book, or series to my life. There is “yet” more to come.

There is coming a time when I will no longer face corruption or decay. I will no longer be perishing. The vileness of my present condition will give way to His untarnished glory. I will be like Him for I will see Him as He is. This sin marred body of flesh will give way to perfection. My body shall no longer bear witness to its frailty. Today I am a memorial to flesh, but then a trophy of His faithfulness. Although I am a descendent of Adam, I have been adopted into the family of God and will bear full witness to my union with Christ.

Today I face a life marred by stress, strain, depression, dysfunction, and disease, but all of this will one day be laid down and exchanged for the glory of God. He will transform me from the inside out, and I will finally reach the finish line. But until then I am called upon to rest and endure knowing that He is moving me “from grime to glory.”

This leads us to our second comparison.

II. An explanation of the resurrection by comparisons from the spiritual world (vv. 45-49).

“Adam’s was the prototype of our natural bodies, whereas Christ’s was the prototype of our spiritual bodies. All the descendants of Adam have natural bodies, and all the descendants of Christ will have spiritual bodies. Christ’s resurrection, therefore, was the prototype of all subsequent resurrection.” (John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, 439).

THE BIG IDEA - Where we began is not where we will finish

A. First Adam versus last Adam

The intent of this designation is to identify headship. Adam was head of the natural world and Christ is head of the spiritual world. Verse 47 points out Adam as the first man whereas Jesus is the second man.

“Adam is called the first man, because he is the root as it were from which we spring. And Christ is the latter man, because he is the beginning of all those that are spiritual, and in him we are all included.” (The Geneva Bible)

B. Living soul versus life giving spirit (v. 45)

Adam received life and Jesus can give life.

C. Natural versus spiritual (v. 46)

The spiritual follows the natural. The first Adam is necessary for the last Adam to bring forth life from death.

D. Earthy versus heavenly (v. 47)

Just as we look to Adam for what we were, we can now look to Christ for what we are and will become.

E. Image of the earthy versus the image of the heavenly (vv. 48, 49)

“Having declared the two headships of humanity, Paul then pointed out the principle that like produces like (15:48-49). All men have received their earthy, corruptible bodies from one man, Adam; and all redeemed men will receive their heavenly, incorruptible bodies from one man, namely Christ. **The guarantee is that all believers will bear ‘the image of the heavenly’ Christ just as they have borne the ‘image of the earthy’ Adam.**” (Robert G. Gromacki, Called to be Saints: An Exposition of 1 Corinthians, 195).

Paul strikes a similar note in Philippians 3:17-21. Although in our present text (1 Cor. 15) he is responding to those who deny a resurrection, here, in Philippians 3 he uses the truth of this glorious transformation as a point of tremendous joy and blessing.

¹⁷ “Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. ¹⁸ For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, ¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. 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 (Phil. 3:17-21).

This transformation is not of essence, but of form. The power exerted in this divine action is like the roar of conquest over the fallen foe.

Consider also Colossians 3:1-4.

¹ “Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³ For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ **When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory**” (Col. 3:1-4).

Note verse 4. There is enormous weight in these words. The Holy Spirit speaks to His church today. He tells us to hold fast to resurrection truth. The day is coming when the Son of God will burst forth in all His glory, and in that day His people will be by His side radiating in them and through them His glory. Oh what joy awaits us! This is why verse 58 says what it does.

This same idea is echoed in John’s Letter in 1 John 3:1-3.

¹ “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ² Beloved, now we are children of God, and **it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.** ³ And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:1-3).

There is an interesting thought presented in 1 John 3. Those who know Christ live pure lives. What follows in 1 John 3:4 and following assures us that those of us who have the seed of God within produce the flower of holiness.

APPLICATION: (What is the NEXT STEP?)

1. Live in the confidence and assurance of a future resurrection. God will fulfill His promises to us.
2. No matter what we face in our earthy bodies, they will one day give way to the heavenly body. Creaturely perfection is coming.
3. There is a grand reunion awaiting all the people of God.
4. Take home application –
 - Think for a moment as to whether or not you know Jesus as your Savior. If you do not know where you will go when you die, then you need to trust Jesus for the saving of your eternal soul. I am calling you to choose Him today.
 - Think for a moment of how “yucky” you often feel. Know this: a divine “shower, meal, and rest” is quickly coming your way.

Knowing it is imminent provides you with endurance in the midst of your struggle.

- Think for a moment of those who have preceded you in death. For those who have died in Christ, they will be raised to live in an existence that will be untouched by the fall.