

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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1 Corinthians 15:35-50 “Our New Resurrection Bodies!”

Intro. Thousands of years ago, Job asked, “If a man die, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14). Is there any assurance that there is life after death? Different people will answer that question in different ways. Of course the atheist will answer, “No. When you die, that’s it.” Many in eastern religions will answer, “Yes, by means of reincarnation.” They say you may come back as an insect, or an animal, or as a person. Some of the Greek philosophers in Paul’s day believed that the soul would be immortal, but they never imagined that the body would one day rise up and join the soul. But that is the clear teaching of Christianity. We believe that when a believer dies, his spirit immediately goes to be with the Lord in heaven. And we believe that God not only saves the spirit of man, but He will also redeem the body. Some day, when Jesus returns to earth (v.23), we will receive resurrection bodies. God will totally reverse the ravages of death.

Some people in Portland, Oregon may have thought the resurrection had already taken place! A classified ad in the *Portland Oregonian* said this: “For sale: double cemetery plot, nice view. Must sell, original owners have moved.”¹ Well, some day some of the original owners of cemetery plots will move for good! The trumpet will sound, and out from those graves will arise believers in their new bodies.

Now many have asked the two questions found in v.35. First, how is it possible for the dead to rise from the dead? Secondly, what kind of body will we have? Paul answers these in my text. Though he doesn’t state the question, he also answers why we need a resurrection body. So let’s look at Paul’s answers to these questions, and learn about the new bodies we shall receive when the great resurrection day comes.

Now the first question I wish to answer is this:

I. WHY DO WE NEED A NEW BODY?

When I talk about a new body, I’m not talking about an extreme makeover. For enough money plastic surgeons and others can give you a new look, but it will only last a few years. Such a makeover does nothing to stop the advancing march of the aging process that leads ultimately to death. And I am not talking about merely resuscitating our old bodies, so that we are back into the bodies that we had before. That’s pretty much what the Jewish Rabbis believed. Instead, Paul is talking about a new body that is quite different & superior to the one that we currently have, but yet has some connection to it.

So why do we need such a new body? There are several reasons given in our text:

A. Our Earthly Bodies Are Perishable –Paul says in v.42b that our old bodies will be “sown in corruption.” Especially when death comes, our earthly bodies decay and perish. This is true of our bodies even before death. When you are young, you have cells dying all the time, but they are replaced by new cells. But as you get older, fewer of those dying cells are replaced with new ones. And so as we become older, our skin begins to wrinkle, our bones become brittle, our teeth and

¹ Submitted by Elaine Pfeifer, *Reader's Digest*, April 2003 [Illus.#C-596].

gums decay more, our hair turns gray and falls out, some more than others. Our muscles become smaller. We become more and more subject to disease. Doesn't that just bless your heart! And then, when death completely takes over, corruption becomes rapid and pronounced. I hope that I do not need to go into detail as to what happens to a dead body. But we try to cover up death's corruption by embalming and placing the body in a beautiful casket surrounded by beautiful flowers. But the fact remains that our earthly bodies are bodies subject to corruption.

And there is a reason why our bodies are corruptible. We are stained by sin's pollution, and thus they bear within them the germs of corruption.

B. Our Earthly Bodies Lack Honor – Paul says in v.43 that our earthly bodies are “sown in dishonor.” Even the most faithful believer dies with his body in a state of dishonor. When you die, the body is no longer fit for anything. It must be disposed of. There is just no much honor in death. When a man dies, he is deprived of all his rights. He loses his money, his land, and all his personal effects. Even the memory of his life is soon forgotten by all but a few.

C. Our Earthly Bodies Are Weak – Paul says in v.43 that our earthly bodies are “sown in weakness.” The Gk. word used is often employed to describe the accompanying inability associated with sickness. Although we can achieve a limited amount of strength through exercise and good health, a gust of wind can bring them sickness; a drop of water can bring them germs and cause infection. Then, when death comes, our bodies become totally weak, unable to lift even a feather.

Then Paul gives another reason:

D. A Heavenly World Requires a New Body - Notice v.50, “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood² cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.” We cannot live for ever in our earthly bodies. And mortal humanity cannot survive in God's eternal and perfectly holy presence. So we must have a new kind of a body.

So it is pretty obvious that we sure need new bodies, especially as we get old and face death. Our old bodies are not going to heaven. And I sure don't want to be resurrected back into the same old body. We really need something far better than the bodies we now have. Aren't you glad that you are going to get to trade this old body in for a newer, better body? So But that leads to my next question:

II. HOW IS IT POSSIBLE TO RECEIVE A NEW BODY?

The reason Paul answered this question was because he was writing to a mostly Greek audience. The Greeks in Paul's day rejected the idea of a bodily resurrection. Likewise, the liberals in our day reject anything that is supernatural. So they say that a bodily resurrection is just impossible. A woman in the Old Testament once said, “For we will surely die and become like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again” (2 Sam. 14:14). Death seems so irreversible. So how is a resurrection even possible? Well in this text of Scripture Paul affirms that the resurrection of the body is indeed possible. Let's follow his arguments. First,

A. Nature Illustrates its Possibility - Paul begins by proving that the resurrection is possible based on an illustration from plant life. The resurrection is a mystery, but not something totally new or beyond the realm of our experience. That is why Paul states in v.36 that the objection to the

² “Flesh and blood” in v.50 was a stock idiom in Jewish circles for “a mere mortal.”

possibility of the resurrection is foolish. Resurrection is not impossible, because it occurs on a small scale continuously in the plant world. And from the plant world we see the following truths:

1. Death Is No Barrier to New Life – Just because something dies does not mean that life cannot come from it. Paul says in v.36, “What you sow is not made alive unless it dies.” When a seed is planted, it dies in the sense that it decomposes. But out from that decay comes new life. Even so Jesus said in Jn. 12:24, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.” We know from the discovery of King Tut’s tomb that even seeds which are thousands of years old can bring forth life when planted. So God provides an illustration of resurrection in the seed and the plant. Even bodies that are thousands of years old will be resurrected some day by the power of God.

2. There Is a Difference between the Old Life and the New – Paul says in v.37, “And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain....” There can be no question that the seed sown had a definite organic relationship with the stalk of wheat produced; yet the two were quite different indeed. Furthermore, what comes up at the harvest is usually more beautiful than what was planted. This is especially true of tulips. Few things are as ugly as a tulip bulb, yet it produces a beautiful flower. The seed and the plant look very different. Even so in the resurrection of bodies there is a difference between the original and final form.

3. Yet, There Is Continuity between the Old Life and the New – In spite of the difference, Paul says in v.38, “But God gives ... to each seed its own body.” When a wheat seed is planted, a wheat plant comes forth, not a corn plant. There is no exception to that law of nature. That little grain that forms on the stalk is like the one you sowed, not identical, but certainly very similar. The same thing is true with the resurrection of the body. One of these days, my body will be deposited in the soil and decay, but in the resurrection, I am going to come forth again in a recognizable state.

Now this relates to an important question that is often asked: “Will we be able to recognize our loved ones in heaven?” From this verse I believe we can say, “Yes.” When we all get to heaven with our resurrection bodies, I will be walking around up there, and you will see me on those streets of gold and say, “Is that you Steve?” And I will say, “Sure is.” Then I wouldn’t be surprised if you exclaim, “Boy, what an improvement!” Even though there will no doubt be a significant improvement, you will still be able to recognize me. We see this truth from the resurrection of Jesus. Whenever Jesus permitted it, He was recognized by His disciples after His resurrection. And so I believe we will know one another when we get to heaven.

Now I want to say one other thing about the possibility of receiving resurrection bodies. The idea of bodily resurrection seems inconceivable because of its complexity and the power demanded to accomplish it. But in v.38 we see another reason why bodily resurrection is possible, and it is simply this:

B. God Makes It Possible – In v.38 Paul writes these important words, “God gives it a body as He pleases.” I will agree that resurrection is impossible if you take God out of the picture. But if God could create a body for Adam out of the dust of the ground, He can create a special resurrection body out of the remains of a decayed body. Resurrection is not impossible, because God is the One who will raise us up from the dead. With God, all things are possible, just as Jesus said (Mt. 19:26)! And Paul said to King Agrippa in Acts 26:8, “Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?” Sure it is incredible if you take God out of the picture. No scientist can take a dead, decomposed body and give it life one again. It is humanly impossible, but

not impossible with God! Even if you cremate your body and have your ashes thrown to the sea, God is able to put those atoms back together.

There was an oral surgeon who talked about the fact that he would see people who had been terribly injured from an automobile accident. He had to restore bones that been crushed, and often he was successful in recreated the facial structure (Vines, p.248). Now if man can do that much, I believe that God can do much more. Even if our bones have decayed into dust, God is able to reform & recreate new life out of that dust.

So even after we die, it is quite possible to receive new bodies. We see that truth illustrated from nature, and we believe we will receive new bodies because of the creative power of God.

Now let's move on to the last question that many will ask:

III. WHAT WILL OUR NEW BODIES BE LIKE?

When some people first hear of the doctrine of the resurrection, they not only consider the doctrine impossible, but also undesirable. Some think of the resurrection as hardly more than a resuscitation of our old body, like the resurrection of Lazarus. So they say, "I don't want my old body back when my soul is set free from it." But that is a misunderstanding of the nature of the resurrection body. You shouldn't think of the resurrection body too closely in terms of our present earthly bodies. So the first truth about our new bodies that I want to share with you is this:

A. Our New Bodies Will Be Quite Different – We have already seen this truth in the illustration of the seed & the plant. Though there is some continuity between our old bodies and our new ones, our new bodies will be quite different in a good way. They will be far more glorious than anything we currently experience or imagine

Now once again Paul illustrates this truth from God's created world. In doing so Paul moves from botany to zoology.

1. The Difference Is Illustrated in Animal Life– Paul says in v.39, "All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds." God gives to each of His creatures the kind of body that is suitable for their environment. Now if that is true in the earthly world, then we may expect that our resurrection bodies will be different because they will be suited to a heavenly environment. And if God is able to make different kinds of bodies for men, animals, birds, and fish, why can He not make a different kind of body for us at the resurrection?

By the way, v.39 is one of the strongest evidences against evolution. No matter what we may eat, 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 other human being but the one we are. There is no repeatable or demonstrable scientific proof that one form of life has changed or could change into another.

2. The Difference Is Illustrated Between Earthly & Heavenly Bodies – Now Paul moves from zoology to astronomy. He says in v.40, "There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial [earthly] bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another." The unproductive barren surface of the moon is decisively distinct from the green Amazon rain forest, and yet there is a wonderful glory associated with the moon just as there is a glory associated with the jungles of the Amazon.

3. The Difference Is Illustrated Even among Heavenly Bodies – Not only are the heavenly bodies vastly different from the earthly; they are greatly different from each other. Paul

says in v.41, “There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory.” Some heavenly bodies generate light, others reflect light. Each generates or reflects light in varying degrees. Thus they differ in glory. The whole point in contrasting sun, moon, and stars is probably not to suggest three different kinds of resurrection bodies but to give further examples of how God can create different kinds of physical entities, depending upon His purpose for each.

So Paul illustrates the difference in bodies in vv.39-41. And before he explains the difference between our natural bodies and our resurrection bodies in vv. 42-44, he ties the two together in v.42 by writing, “So also is the resurrection of the dead.” Since the world is filled with different kinds of bodies, why should it be thought incredible that God could create still one more kind of body—a resurrected human body? Resurrection bodies will differ from earthly bodies just as radically as heavenly bodies differ from earthly (v.40). So don’t worry that you are just going to get your same old body back on that resurrection morning. No, your new body will be vastly different & superior.

So we know that our resurrection bodies will be different. Now let’s see in what ways our bodies will be different. One thing we know is this:

B. Our New Bodies Will Bear the Image of Christ – Now beginning in v.45 Paul makes a comparison and contrast between Adam, the head of the fallen human race, and Jesus, the Head of the redeemed human race. Now notice what Paul says in vv.48-49, “As was the man of dust,³ so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.” We bear the same characteristics of the first man, Adam. Our bodies share Adam’s sin, Adam’s body, and Adam’s death.

But I have good news. When we believe in Jesus Christ, we receive the spiritual seed of new life. Paul says in the last part of v.45, “The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.” And though Adam was of the earth, v.47 says that Jesus “is the Lord from heaven.” He originated from heaven. He alone can give us hope of a heavenly home. In Adam we are earthy; in Christ we have become heavenly. And just as we have been a reproduction of Adam in our earthy bodies, so our heavenly body will be a reproduction of the glorified body of Jesus. One of these days, we’ll fully bear the image of Christ. I Jn. 3:2 says, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (cf. Rom. 8:29). We will have a body like unto His resurrection body. God is determined to populate eternity with a race of people who are just like Jesus Christ. The resurrection body completes the work of redemption.

This gives us a clue concerning what our new bodies will be like. Christ’s resurrected body was tangible. You could touch Him, and hug Him. And if that’s true, then we will be able to hug each other in a loving and holy way. But even though His body was material, He could go through walls. He could also appear and disappear at will. He could eat but He didn’t have to (Luke 24:33-43; John 20:19-29).

Now because our new bodies will be like Jesus, we can be sure of the other characteristics of our new bodies:

³ In Genesis 2 we learn that God made Adam from the dirt of the earth. The word translated “dust” (*choikos*), used only in this chapter, refers to “earth dug out and heaped up,” “loose earth,” or even just “dust.”

C. Our New Bodies Will Be Imperishable – Paul says in v.42b that our new bodies will be “raised in incorruption.” Likewise Paul says in v.54 that “this corruptible [will] put on incorruption, and this mortal [will] put on immortality.” Our new bodies will never sigh a groan of fatigue or utter a cry of pain. There will be no sickness, disease, deformity, or blemishes. There is no decay or death in heaven.

One time there were 2 martyrs who were being burned at the stake for their faith in Jesus Christ. One happened to be blind & one happened to be lame. As the soldiers were tying them to the stake and lighting the fire, the lame man threw away his crutch and said, “Take courage, brother. This fire shall cure us both.” He said that on the basis of God’s promise to us (Vines, p.248-9).

D. Our New Bodies Will Be Glorious – Paul says in v.43 that our new bodies will be “raised in glory.” The day will come when our bodies will shine with the glory of God. Phil. 3:21 says that Christ “will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body.” In Dan. 12:3 we read, “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.” I don’t think that we will have halos over our head. Instead, I believe that our bodies will radiate with the glory of God.

E. Our New Bodies Will Be Strong – Paul says in v.43 that our new bodies will be “raised in power.” No longer will our bodies be afflicted with weakness, including the weakness of sickness. In that day Rev. 21:4 says “there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain....” We will no longer have to say that “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mt. 26:41). We will have all the power we need and very few of the limitations that we currently have due to our bodily weakness. Like Jesus, we will have the power to travel at unbelievable rates of speed. If God wills, we would be able to cast a mountain into the sea.

F. Our New Bodies Will Be Supernatural – Paul says in v.44 that our new bodies will be “raised a spiritual body.” This does not mean that our bodies will not be in any sense material, but “spiritual” is in contrast with “natural.”⁴ They are also “spiritual” in the sense that they will be perfectly suited for a heavenly, supernatural life (cf. Lk. 20:34-36). Our bodies will be perfectly able to worship, serve, and love the Lord Jesus, for hours on end if we want to! You won’t be looking at your watch because you are hungry, or because your back is hurting. I believe our resurrection bodies will be perfectly suited for our heavenly, spiritual environment. But we will not be just bodiless spirits.

We see an illustration of that in v.39. Animals have fir to enable them to live in the wild. Fish have a certain type of body to live in water. Birds have a different kind of body to live and fly in the air. And even so, we are going to have special bodies, perfectly suited for our eternal life in heaven.

A group of liberal scholars gathered and were glad to hear someone present a paper showing that the resurrection is spiritual, not physical, based on v.44 of my text. But someone from the audience raised a question to the scholar presenting the paper. “Which is stronger, a noun or an adjective?” The man admitted that the noun is more important. The questioner responded by pointing out that emphasis was being placed on the adjective “spiritual” rather than the noun

⁴ The terms “natural” and “spiritual” in v.44 use the identical language Paul has already used in 2:6-16 to indicate the difference between Christians and non-Christians.

“body.” He said, “The only thing that is carried over in resurrection is the body. It’s one kind of body when it dies, a natural body. It’s raised up as another kind of body, but it’s still a body.”

What a hope this is! Whatever happens to our present bodies, they are not our permanent bodies. We should not be overly concerned about them. These bodies will die. And the graves of believers are just seed plots of resurrection bodies.

Conclusion: Do you realize that all people will receive a resurrection body? (See John 5:29; Acts 24:15). If you never place your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you will be raised with an incorruptible body as well. But that only means that your body will never perish in the fires of hell (cf. Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:11-15). That’s why Jesus described hell as a place “where ‘Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched’” (Mk. 9:44, 46, 48).

But I have good news. You need not fear death. Christ has conquered death, and promised us total & complete victory over death. Don’t you want to be a part of the resurrection that leads to eternal life in heaven? Well Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Place your trust in Him, and He will grant you the kind of wonderful resurrection body that I have been speaking of today.

V.46 states an important biblical principle: first the “natural” (earthly), and then the “spiritual” (heavenly). The first birth gives us that which is natural, but the second birth gives us that which is spiritual. God rejects the first birth, the natural, and says, “You must be born again!” If we depend on our first birth, we shall be condemned forever; but if we experience the new birth, we shall be blessed forever.

So the choice is clear. Will you make the right choice today? Trust in Him today. The Bible says, “For ‘whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.’” Call upon Him in believing prayer, & you will be saved.

Sources: Craig Blomberg, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Paige Patterson, *The Troubled Triumphant Church: an Exposition of First Corinthians* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Jerry Vines, *God Speaks Today: A Study of 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Wise: 1 Corinthians* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).