

The Resurrection Body and the Rapture of the Church

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

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36 Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. **37** And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other grain. **38** But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body. **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. **40** There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. **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. **42** So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. **43** It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. **44** It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. **45** And so it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. **46** However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. **47** The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. **48** As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. **49** And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man. Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.”

Background Notes

1 Corinthians 15 is the great Resurrection Chapter of the Bible. In this chapter, the resurrection of Christ is shown to be a fact of history and the foundation of the Christian faith. If Christ has not risen from the dead, the Christian faith has no basis.

1 Corinthians 15 certainly teaches the resurrection of Christ, but the main portion of the chapter concerns the resurrection of the believer. The Corinthian believers did not doubt the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, but they did have doubts and questions about the bodily resurrection of the believer. So in this chapter Paul answered those questions. Throughout church history many Christians have had similar doubts and questions about the bodily resurrection of believers.

In verse 35, Paul anticipated the typical response to the great truth of the bodily resurrection of the believer. What are the mechanics of bodily resurrection, and what kind of body is it? *“But someone will say, “How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?”(v35).*

Paul's response to that typical question could be paraphrased as follows: "Now that's a foolish question. Look around you! There are plenty of illustrations from nature to help us understand these things."

Doctrinal Points

1. The resurrection body will be glorious and spiritual.

An illustration from nature is planting a seed (v36-38). When a seed is planted in the ground, the seed "dies." The resulting plant is not the seed. It doesn't look like the seed - but it is intimately associated with the seed. It has come from the seed, and that kind of seed always results in the same kind of plant. In the same way, the resurrection body is not the old body. Although it does not look like the old body, it is definitely associated with the old body that died. It is *your* body that is resurrected, not someone else's body!

There is a special glory associated with the resurrected body. Just as the sun, moon and stars, the natural heavenly bodies, have differing glories, so our resurrected bodies will have differing glories (v40-44).

I believe that our reward in heaven for faithful service on earth will be a factor in the future glory of our resurrection bodies. Notice verse 58: "... *be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*" What a great promise! There will be rewards in heaven, and the glory of the resurrection body may be part of these rewards.

The emphasis in verses 42-50 is on the fact that the resurrection body will be a spiritual body. Not spiritual in the sense of immaterial, like a "spiritual jellyfish" floating around in space – but spiritual in the sense that our resurrection bodies will be in tune with our renewed spirits in Christ.

In Matthew 26:41 our Lord said that the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Right now our natural bodies are subject to sin and the desires of the flesh. Our resurrection bodies will not be subject to sin and death. They will be adapted to, and controlled by, our sinless spirits.

We will not have bodies like Adam and Eve, who were able to sin and die. Our resurrection bodies will be like our Lord's glorious resurrection body – sinless, eternal bodies! Philippians 3:21 says that "*The Lord will transform our lowly body, that it may be conformed to His glorious body according to the working by which He is able, even to subdue all things to Himself.*" The resurrection body will be glorious and spiritual.

2. The resurrection body will be imperishable and immortal.

Verses 51-57: *“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ . Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”*

Verses 51-57 are one of the great Rapture passages in the New Testament. The other is found in 1 Thessalonians 4. The Rapture of the Church, when the Lord Himself comes to take believers home to Heaven, could come at any time. It will include believers who are alive in Christ, and believers who have died in Christ.

Notice that Paul anticipated the Rapture could possibly take place while he was still living. Paul included himself in the “expected living category” when he said that the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed! He echoed that thought in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: *“...the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”*

Notice that the entire Rapture passage in 1 Corinthians 15 is in the context of Paul’s discussion of the resurrection body. At the Rapture, the bodies of believers who are alive will be changed from mortal to immortal, and the bodies of believers who have died in Christ will be changed from perishable to imperishable. This transformation is going to be a quick change. Verse 52 says, *“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”* I don’t know about you, but I like this truth of a quick change. The idea of my body going through a slow process of change doesn’t appeal to me, but a quick change does!

The Rapture of the Church is described as a “*mystery*” in verse 51. A biblical *mystery* is truth that was concealed in the Old Testament but is now revealed in the New Testament. The mystery here is not the resurrection – it’s the Rapture! Even the bodily resurrection of believers was understood in the Old Testament. Listen to words of Job 19:25-27: *“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.”*

Job is possibly the oldest book in the Bible and the bodily resurrection of the believer was clearly understood there. So the resurrection of the believer was not a mystery, but the Rapture of the Church was a mystery.

The fact that some believers will not die, but will be made immortal when the Lord returns for His Church, is a truth that was not known in the Old Testament. And the fact that believers who have died in Christ are a select company who will be resurrected out from among the dead was not known in the Old Testament. What a victory over death that will be! The sting of death will be erased because Jesus Christ has overcome the problem of sin, which caused death, and He has satisfied God's moral law, which enforced the penalty of death.

This victory was predicted by the Old Testament prophets (v54-55). This victory has been accomplished by our Lord Jesus Christ (v57). And we who have put our faith in Christ as our Savior are part of that victory! Our salvation includes not only everlasting life in reference to our souls and spirits, but our eternal resurrection bodies as well. The resurrection body will be imperishable and immortal.

Practical Application

Don't determine your doctrine from illustrations!

This is an important principle for properly interpreting the Scripture. In verse 52, Paul used the illustration of the sounding of the "last trumpet." The "last trumpet" is a military term. The "first trumpet call" signaled the troops to get ready. The "last trumpet call" was the signal for the troops to move out. So, in like manner, at the Rapture we will "move out" when the Lord calls us! It's a great illustration!

Some Christians have equated the "last trumpet" in this illustration with the symbol of the Seventh Trumpet Judgment in the book of Revelation. Then on that basis they have built up a doctrine that the Rapture will take place sometime during the Tribulation.

Using an illustration to determine doctrine is *bad hermeneutics!* Those who do so are certainly not practicing good principles of interpretation. So – be careful! Don't determine your doctrine from illustrations.