



AN IMPERFECT LOCAL CHURCH
A Study in 1 Corinthians
TEACHER – Lesson 23

GENERAL OUTLINE

1 Corinthians 15:1-58, Another report – The resurrection

OUTLINE: Lesson 23

1 Corinthians 15:1-58, Another report – The resurrection

15:1-11, Christ is risen

15:12-19, The resurrection of Christ and logical implications

15:20-28, The resurrection of Christ and ultimate implications

15:29-34, Secondary arguments for resurrection

15:35-49, The resurrection body

15:50-58, Resurrection victory

Paul has devoted much of this letter to correction and rebuke. He repeatedly called for repentance and improved behavior. The relationships between Christians (i.e., fellowship) has also been a major and constant thread of thought. In his treatment of this last major subject of resurrection, it seems that he wants to conclude on a more positive note. Indeed, there could be few topics more positive than the Christian's anticipation of the glorious transformation and victory over all the corruption of this world in the final day when the "last trumpet" calls us together for eternity.

DISCUSSION

1 Corinthians 15:35-41, Examples of bodies and transformations

- 1. In nature, is it unusual for something (e.g., a sort of body) to exist in some form, for that form to die, and then to reappear in a different form (i.e., a transformation)? Give some additional examples to those Paul cites. What are the commonalities between the earlier and later form or body, and what are some differences?**

It is not at all unusual. Any seed that is planted will die in its seed form and then reappear in a new form (the plant). Additional examples would include caterpillars and butterflies or any larva to insect transformation.

They are the same living organism, but they look different, function differently, have a different destiny, etc. It might help us if we could see our own death as a moment of transformation more than an end to life.

2. Who or what empowers the transformation and determines the form of the plant that grows from the seed? How does this relate to our resurrection?

God sets the parameters and outcomes (cf. Genesis 1:24-25). God either acts directly to bring about the change or to put the elements in place that produce the change.

Our resurrection works the same way. We have our present bodies because God made us that way, and it is God's power that will raise us from the dead in our spiritual bodies. If he can do this in plants, why not in humans?

3. Are the "heavenly bodies" of v. 40 a reference to our resurrected bodies or to what we often call "heavenly bodies" such as the sun, moon and stars? Either way, what is Paul's message with this example?

It could be either, but the terminology itself sets the stage for the discussion of natural and spiritual bodies in later verses. Paul's point is that there are a variety of bodies and life forms. The presence of one doesn't exclude the other. For example, even though the sun is a ball of flaming gases and the moon more of a barren rock, they are both real and play a useful role. Each one has qualities (i.e., glory) that make it valuable.

1 Corinthians 15:42-44, "So is the resurrection"

4. How is the pre-resurrection body described? How is the post-resurrection body described?

Pre-resurrection

Corruption/perishable
Dishonor
Weakness
Natural

Post-resurrection

Incorruption/imperishable
Glory
Power
Spiritual

These descriptions affirm difference, but also continuity and improvement. A few verses later Paul will describe more fully why the improvement is important.

We seem to struggle with the idea of a resurrection body since the word "body" itself incites an image of a core with arms, legs, head, etc. The resurrection body will be the same body, but with changes that may make it unrecognizable to our current imaginations.

5. What are some weaknesses of our earthly bodies that will be corrected in our resurrection bodies (cf. Revelation 21:4; 2 Corinthians 4:16)?

Everything that makes the body not eternally durable. Our current body ages, is illness-prone, and is subject to decomposition. This change to incorruptible may require more than longer lasting parts and genes. It may require changes of “matter” that we cannot imagine. We can’t visualize a human body that is not flesh and blood.

1 Corinthians 15:45-49, The 1st man and the 2nd man

6. What was Adam’s relationship to life-giving power, and what was Jesus’ relationship to life-giving power (cf. Genesis 2:7)?

Adam received life (the breath of life) and then lost it.
Jesus gives life (the life-giving spirit) having defeated death.

7. Of what is the 1st man made? Of what is the 2nd man made? If you have difficulty stating exactly of what each or either is made, describe some general characteristics of each one.

The 1st man is/was made of dust.

Christ is spirit that took on flesh. The analogy has its limits for describing the composition of Christ, but Paul’s message is that we share the physical, corruptible likeness of Adam, and we will share the spiritual, incorruptible likeness of Christ.

The resurrected Christ appeared to the disciples with a physical-looking body that could pass through walls or simply “appear” in a locked room. Paul doesn’t venture into a discussion of whether our resurrection bodies will be able to do the same, or if the heavenly glory of Christ dispenses with such earth-like features.

8. What is the difference between the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11) and that of Christ and our own resurrection?

Lazarus did not receive a transformed, incorruptible body in John 11. He died and was raised with the same form and nature that he had before he died. The point is not belabored, but it is obvious that he was raised prior to the victory of Jesus over death. However, later post-ascension resurrections (e.g., Dorcas in Acts 9:36-43) were also simple, physical resurrections without the transformation from corruption to incorruption.

1 Corinthians 15:15:50-58, Resurrection victory

In this concluding paragraph of the chapter on resurrection, Paul lifts our eyes to the heavens from whence our Lord will come to change us fully into his likeness and put all the negatives of corruption and sin behind us. On earth we suffer, and sometimes we suffer for our faith, but when Christ gives us victory none of that will matter and all our struggles and efforts on earth will be validated.

9. Earlier in verses 42-44 Paul introduced the idea of incorruptible, spiritual resurrection bodies. What specific detail does he provide here (vv. 50-58) to clarify what that means?

It still isn't totally clear what our resurrection bodies will look like to the human eye, and it may be that in our current bodies we are unable to imagine or fathom conditions in a 100% spiritual realm. But flesh and blood will not be a part of our future, resurrection bodies. That doesn't tell us if our bodies will have a shape like our earthly bodies, but flesh and blood will not be included.

10. In verses 42-44, Paul described our resurrection bodies (cf. question 4). What descriptive terms does he add or repeat in this paragraph (cf. Philippians 3:20-21)?

Incorruptible, changed, immortal, not flesh & blood, victorious.
Philippians 3:21, Transformed and conformed to Christ's glorious body

11. Who are the "we" who will be changed (v. 51; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:1-2)? Why do you think he limited his discussion to this group and their resurrection?

Paul is writing to believers in Christ about believers in Christ. The "body composition" of unbelievers wasn't the issue in Corinth. He is concerned with believers who, if they denied the resurrection, would lose out on the hope and victory that they would enjoy in that event. He is affirming the truth of resurrection to provide encouragement to faithfulness until that event.

12. In what way(s) is sin the "sting of death"? How does the law give strength to sin? How can we overcome the impact of that sting?

Because we sin, we will eventually die physically. Only in Christ do we find the life-giving antidote to the venom of this sting.

Paul elaborates on this topic in Romans 7. The law reveals our sin, and in some cases we are attracted to forbidden things because they are outlawed by the law. At the same time, the law shows us that we are all sinners who have no hope of eternal life if we are limited to our response to the law because our response to the law will always be imperfect.

Only Christ can free us from the strength of sin and give us victory over death.

13. The first part of the chapter (vv. 1-34) asserts the reality of the resurrection. The rest of the chapter gives information about what will happen when we are resurrected. Both sections end with exhortations (vv. 33-34, 57-58) that say nothing specific about resurrection itself. What is the message that is common to both concluding statements and how does it connect to the subject of the resurrection?

Merely believing in a resurrection is not enough. Belief in the resurrection is intended to motivate us to live faithful lives that strive towards that eternal victory (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). As emphasized in 15:16-19, 32, denial of the resurrection removes any reason to live a Christian life. Faithful living is founded on sound doctrine.

14. How does 15:58 reflect the ideas of 1:1-2?

Paul addressed the letter to those who are “sanctified, called to be saints,” and who call on the name of Jesus Christ (cf. 6:9-11). Paul ends his discussion of the resurrection by exhorting those same saints to remain steadfast and immovable in their faith so that their efforts would not be wasted (vain).