

Week 3: 1 Corinthians 15:35–49 – The Resurrection Body

Hook



Main Point: Our resurrected bodies are glorified, imperishable eternal versions of ourselves.

Q: What kind of phone did you use before you got your first smartphone?

Q: What feature on your first smartphone amazed you the most?

On January 9, 2007, Steve Jobs unveiled the iPhone to massive acclaim. He introduced it as three devices in one: a widescreen iPod with touch controls, a revolutionary mobile phone, and a breakthrough internet communication device. Jobs claimed that Apple had reinvented the phone, calling it a “revolutionary and magical product”. It was still a phone—but it was unlike anything people had ever seen before.¹

Transition: The difference between the natural body and the resurrected body is even greater than the gap between an old Nokia brick phone and an iPhone. They’re both phones, just as these are both bodies—but the experience is completely different.

RECAP: In this year’s Easter series, instead of studying the actual Easter account of the Resurrection in the Gospels, we are doing a deep dive into 1 Corinthians 15, Paul’s most comprehensive theological statement about the Resurrection and what it means for believers.

In lesson 1, we learned that the Resurrection is not a theological side issue but is central to the Gospel, that the Resurrection is a verifiable fact supported by many eyewitnesses, and that the transformation the Spirit makes in our lives when we accept Christ is itself a resurrection. Our old self dies, and we are risen to a new life in Christ. In lesson 2, we learned that because Jesus was bodily resurrected, we can be confident of our own bodily resurrection.

In this lesson, we will learn about this resurrection body and what it means to be made new in the final consummated kingdom of God.

Week 3: 1 Corinthians 15:35–49 – The Resurrection Body

Book

Main Point: Our resurrected bodies are glorified, imperishable eternal versions of ourselves.

1 Corinthians 15:35–41 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Our earthly bodies are just a seed of our heavenly bodies.

Q: How does the seed imagery explain the relationship between the earthly body and the heavenly body?

Paul spent this next section describing what the resurrection body is like. He used a form of ancient Greek rhetoric called the diatribe, in which the writer anticipates objections people may have to their argument and answers them one by one. Opening with “*someone* will ask” shows us that these questions aren’t necessarily ones the Corinthians had asked but ones Paul may have heard from other people. He was answering the objection before they raised it.

Depending on how you read the question, it sounds very reasonable, like a question most of us still have today. “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body?” This is something many of us still ponder. It seems perfectly reasonable to ask this kind of question, but Paul responded to the question with “you foolish person,” a very strong reaction that makes it seem as if we’re reading it wrong.

Paul’s answer about the seed’s having to die shows us that the question wasn’t just about the type of body we will have in when Jesus returns. It was an objection people were making to the very idea of resurrection of the dead in general, even to Jewish rabbis at the time. How is it possible for the dead to be raised? What if the body were decapitated, completely burned, or otherwise severely damaged? In their mind, these examples “proved” that resurrection was a ridiculous concept. The Jewish rabbis answered this by saying the body would be resurrected from a particular bone in the neck they believed was indestructible. They said the body would be raised as it was and then healed of any infirmities but still be a human body as it was when the person was on earth.

But Paul responded by using a seed as an analogy. A seed has to “die” to “come to life” as a plant. Sowing a seed in the ground is like burying a body. The kernel of the seed has to break open for the plant to grow out of it. The seed and the plant are connected to one another, but they are not the same thing; the plant is the full, complete outgrowth

of the seed. This is a very different concept than being raised again in a healed but otherwise unchanged body.

Paul described the heavenly body as radically transformed from the earthly body. The earthly body is just a “seed” of the heavenly body. The two are certainly connected; but they are not the same thing. Our heavenly bodies will still be us; they will be recognizable to our friends and family. But they will not be just like our earthly bodies. They will be a whole new level, as a plant is to a seed or a chicken is to an egg. This is transformation, not just restoration. It’s a new creation blooming out of the old, not just a return to the original creation.

Paul used another comparison to explain. There are different kinds of “flesh” for different creatures on earth – human, birds, animals, fish. These are the same categories of creatures listed in the creation (Genesis 1), which points us ahead to the idea that the resurrection of the dead is part of the new creation (Revelation 21–22). Just as there are different kinds of flesh on earth, there are different kinds of flesh for earth and heaven.

Yet Paul didn’t say the earthly body is evil and only the heavenly body is glorious. That is Greek philosophical belief called *Platonic dualism*. The biblical view doesn’t separate body and soul the way the Greeks did; both are part of the whole person. Paul didn’t condemn the earthly body; he said it was also glorious, just a different kind of glory. It is not that the earthly form is a body, and the eternal form is a soul. The earthly body/soul is a “seed” of the full-grown “plant” of the heavenly body/soul. Both are glorious in their own way because both are made in the image of God.

Q: What ideas are prevalent in the culture about what eternity will be like? How do they compare to this passage?

Q: How does the seed analogy help you understand this better?

1 Corinthians 15:42–44 [Read]

Talking Point 2: The resurrection body is imperishable, powerful and honorable.

Q: What is the difference between what is sown and what is raised? What does this tell us about the difference between the natural body and the spiritual body?

We just finished explaining that Paul was not condemning the earthly body as evil while commending the heavenly body as glorious, and then we read these verses that may at first sound contradictory. But we have to understand the flow of Paul’s diatribe-style argument. The last section (vv. 39–41) offered the illustrative analogies; this section (vv. 42–44) is the application.

In the analogies section, Paul gave us three examples of differences: 1) different kinds of flesh – humans, animals, birds, fish; 2) different kinds of bodies – earthly, heavenly; and 3) different kinds of glory – sun, moon, stars. Paul was explaining that a difference in glory from earth to heaven does not mean non-physicality or non-continuity. God has already shown us there are multiple modes of embodied existence, each appropriate to its realm. Paul was not saying earthly is bad and heavenly is good but that God gives bodies that are appropriate to different domains.

The “So it is” in verse 42 is the crucial hinge phrase that connects the analogies to the application. Paul was not introducing a new, contradictory idea; he was explaining resurrection using the analogy of differing glories – what is sown (seed) versus what is raised (full plant). The repeated phrases “it is sown ... it is raised,” show continuity of identity. It’s the same person, but in different modes of existence. Earthly body transforming to resurrection body; earthly glory transforming to heavenly glory:

- Perishable to imperishable – This first one is simple. We go from mortal to immortal, from a form that can die to a form that cannot die. The rest is what might get confusing, but they all essentially say the same thing in different ways. This is a common format of Hebrew poetry, repeating the same idea with different phrases.
- Dishonor to glory—This isn’t to say the earthly body is evil or wrong. This isn’t a moral or sinful kind of “dishonor.” It’s related to the honor/shame culture of their day in which a dead body was unclean, offensive, disgraceful. Death subjects the body to “humiliation” – decay, weakness, loss of beauty. But resurrection reverses that state. Like perishable to imperishable, this is also about mortality versus immortality. The Gospel dignifies the body, promising that what is now disgraceful will become splendid.²
- Weakness to power – We see the same mortality-to-immortality in this phrase. The earthly body is weak because it *can* die. The heavenly body is powerful because it *cannot* die.
- Natural to spiritual – This doesn’t mean physical versus non-physical; it’s about what governs or empowers the body. The word “natural” is *psyche* – the soul or mind, so it’s not just the flesh. The word “spiritual” is *pneuma*, the Spirit. The difference isn’t flesh versus spirit; it is that the natural body is governed by the human soul/mind; the spiritual body is governed by the Holy Spirit.

The resurrection body is the full-grown version of the “seed” that was the earthly body. It is imperishable, and it is governed and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The resurrection body is the glorified version of humanity, empowered by the Spirit, in perfect fellowship with God with no hindrance from sin.

Q: How would your life be different if your body were perfect and imperishable?

Q: How would your life be different if you were in perfect fellowship with God and completely guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit?

1 Corinthians 15:45–49 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Our eternal, glorified bodies have the Spirit of God.

Q: What impact did sin have on the world? On humanity? On our physical bodies?

Q: What does it mean to bear the image of the “man of heaven”?

This section continues the comparison of the “natural body” to the “spiritual body” by comparing the first Adam to the second Adam (Jesus). Again, this reminds us that the resurrected body is part of the new creation, of God’s not only restoring all things to Himself but making them new. Paul referred to the creation story, when the first Adam (“Adam” means *man*) became a living being (Genesis 2:7). Paul used the same language of “natural” body versus “spiritual” body to contrast Adam and Jesus. Adam became a “living soul” (*psyche*, the same word used for “natural” body). Jesus became a “life-giving spirit” (*pneuma*, the same word used for “spiritual” body).

In Genesis, Adam became a living soul when God breathed “the breath of life” into his nostrils. In Hebrew, the word for “spirit” in the Holy Spirit (*ruach*) can also mean “breath,” but the “breath of life” God breathed into Adam was a different word. It is God who gives all human beings life, but it’s a natural breath at first, not the Holy Spirit. When we are made new creations in Christ, then the Holy Spirit dwells in us (Ezekiel 36:27; 1 Corinthians 6:19–20; 2 Corinthians 5:17). At that point, we are still living in our natural, perishable bodies, but we have the Holy Spirit in us. It’s like having a foot in both worlds, a citizen of heaven walking around on earth (Philippians 3:20). It is the Holy Spirit in us who empowers us to be resurrected as the eternal spiritual body (resurrected body) in the age to come, when our perishable body dies, and we are made new in God’s final kingdom.

Paul said the first Adam was a man of dust, from the earth. Scripture describes God’s literally making Adam out of the dust of the earth and breathing life into him. But Jesus is the man of heaven. The contrast between “those who are of the dust” and “those who are of heaven” reminds us of the distinction between our bodies now and our resurrected bodies that are yet to come. The earthly body will die and return to the earth, whether buried or cremated. Our new bodies will be made in the image of the glorified, resurrected body of Jesus.

This reflects the *process* of sanctification in our lives. We are born once in the natural body but born again in Christ when He puts His Spirit within our natural earthly bodies (John 3:1–8). We are made new creations in Christ the minute we accept Him as our Lord and Savior, even though we are still in the same physical body. Then the Spirit works in us throughout our lives to grow our inner person into His image with ever increasing glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). But we will not be conformed completely to His image until we are given glorified bodies in the new creation. In this life, we are in a kind of in-between, like the difference between seeing “through a mirror dimly,” and seeing face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Q: What does it tell us about humanity that we are all created by God in His image? How does this affect your view of other people?

Q: How can we grow more into the image of Christ, even in this life? Though it’s ultimately a work of the Spirit, what practical steps can we take toward growing to be more like Jesus?

Week 3: 1 Corinthians 15:35–49 – The Resurrection Body

Took

Main Point: Our resurrected bodies are glorified, imperishable eternal versions of ourselves.

Consider bringing a few different seeds with you to LifeGroup – perhaps even giving a seed or seed packet to each member. Paul reminds us that our earthly bodies are like seeds: What is sown is not what will be raised. In Christ, these bodies will be transformed into something incredible. Our present bodies are subject to decay, but we look forward to bodies that will never perish.

The resurrected body is a gracious gift from God – perfectly suited for glory and for life in the presence of the King. Though we cannot yet see the full fruit of what will be, believers hold fast to God’s promise of a glorified body with confident hope.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Imagine what it will be like to be in a perfected glorified body – not just the part about not having any sickness or pain, though that part will be great, but the part about being in the image of Christ.

PRAY for God to make you more like Jesus. Ask the Holy Spirit to grow His spiritual fruit in you and give you a heart that loves the world the way Jesus does and treats others the way He did. Thank God that He is making you more like Him on the inside and that one day He will make you will be experience incredible transformation in your body as well. Pray for opportunities in the coming weeks and months to share with others the hope you have in the resurrected body.

ACT: Plant a seed. Plant a seed this week (or a whole garden if you want) and reflect on the way a seed’s becoming a plant reflects the process of sanctification in our lives. During this time, you aren’t just waiting to rise again. God is growing you and working on you during this time to grow His spiritual fruit in you.

¹ <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/january-9/steve-jobs-debuts-the-iphone>

² Orville J. Nave, *Nave’s Topical Bible* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2002).