

Why Are the Dead Raised? ([1 Cor. 15:29-34](#), [49-58](#))

The resurrection of the human body is a future event that has compelling implications for our personal lives. If the resurrection is not true, then we can forget about the future and live as we please! But the resurrection is true! Jesus *is* coming again! Even if we die⁶¹⁹ before He comes, we shall be raised at His coming and stand before Him in a glorified body.

Paul cited four areas of Christian experience that are touched by the fact of the resurrection.

Evangelism ([v. 29](#)). What does it mean to be "baptized for the dead"? Some take this to mean "proxy baptism," where a believer is baptized on behalf of a dead relative; but we find no such teaching in the New Testament. In the second century, there were some heretical groups that practiced "vicarious baptism," but the church at large has never accepted the practice. To begin with, salvation is a personal matter that each must decide for himself; and, second, nobody needs to be baptized to be saved.

The phrase probably means "baptized to take the place of those who have died." In other words, if there is no resurrection, why bother to witness and win others to Christ? Why reach sinners who are then baptized and take the place of those who have died? If the Christian life is only a "dead-end street," get off of it!

Each responsible person on earth will share in either the resurrection of life and go to heaven, or the resurrection of judgment and go to hell ([John 5:28-29](#)). We weep for believers who have died, but we ought also to weep for unbelievers who still have opportunity to be saved! The reality of the resurrection is a motivation for evangelism.

Suffering ([vv. 30-32](#)). *I die daily* does not refer to "dying to self," as in [Romans 6](#), but to the physical dangers Paul faced as a servant of Christ ([2 Cor. 4:8-5:10](#); [11:23-28](#)). He was in constant jeopardy from his enemies and on more than one occasion had been close to death. Why endure suffering and danger if death ends it all? "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die" ([Isa. 22:13](#)).

What we do in the body in this life comes up for review at the Judgment Seat of Christ ([2 Cor. 5:10](#)). God deals with the *whole* person, not just with the "soul." The body shares in salvation ([Rom. 8:18-23](#)). The suffering endured in the body will result in glory at the resurrection ([2 Cor. 4:7-18](#)). If there is no future for the body, then why suffer and die for the cause of Christ?

Separation from sin ([vv. 33-34](#)). If there is no resurrection, then what we do with our bodies will have no bearing on our future. Immorality was a way of life in Corinth, and some of the believers rejected the resurrection in order to rationalize their sin. "Evil company corrupts good morals" is a quotation from the Greek poet Menander, a saying no doubt familiar to Paul's readers. The believer's body is the temple of God and must be kept separated from the sins of the world ([2](#)

[Cor. 6:14-7:1](#)). To fellowship with the "unfruitful works of darkness" ([Eph. 5:6-17](#)) is only to corrupt God's temple.

It was time for the Corinthians to *wake up* and *clean up* (see [1 Thes. 5:4-11](#)). The believer who is compromising with sin has no witness to the lost around him, those who "have not the knowledge of God." What a shameful thing to be selfishly living in sin while multitudes die without Christ!

Death ([yv. 49-57](#)). The heavenly kingdom is not made for the kind of bodies we now have, bodies of flesh and blood. So when Jesus returns, the bodies of living believers will instantly be transformed to be like His body ([1 John 3:1-3](#)), and the dead believers shall be raised with new glorified bodies. Our new bodies will not be subject to decay or death.

Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychiatry, wrote: "And finally there is the painful riddle of death, for which no remedy at all has yet been found, nor probably ever will be." Christians have victory *in* death and *over* death! Why? Because of the victory of Jesus Christ in His own resurrection. Jesus said, "Because I live, ye shall also" ([John 14:19](#)).

Sin, death, and the Law go together. The Law reveals sin, and the "wages of sin is death" ([Rom. 6:23](#)). Jesus bore our sins on the cross ([1 Peter 2:24](#)), and also bore the curse of the Law ([Gal. 3:13](#)). It is through Him that we have this victory, and we share the victory *today*. The literal translation of [1 Corinthians 15:57](#) is, "But thanks be to God who *keeps on giving us the victory* through our Lord Jesus Christ." We experience "the power of His resurrection" in our lives as we yield to Him ([Phil. 3:10](#)).

[First Corinthians 15:58](#) is Paul's hymn of praise to the Lord as well as his closing admonition to the church. Because of the assurance of Christ's victory over death, we know that nothing we do for Him will ever be wasted or lost. We can be steadfast in our service, un-movable in suffering, abounding in ministry to others, because we know our labor is not in vain. [First Corinthians 15:58](#) is the answer to Ecclesiastes, where thirty-eight times Solomon used the sad word *vanity*. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!" wept Solomon; but Paul sang a song of victory!

How Are the Dead Raised? ([1 Cor. 15:35-48](#))

Being philosophers, the Greeks reasoned that the resurrection of the human body was an impossibility. After all, when the body turned to dust, it became soil from which other bodies derived nourishment. In short, the food that we eat is a part of the elements of the bodies of generations long gone. When the body of the founder of Rhode Island, Roger Williams, was disinterred, it was discovered that the roots of a nearby apple tree had grown through the coffin. To some degree, the people who ate the apples partook of his body. At the resurrection, then, who will claim the various elements?

Paul's reply to this kind of reasoning was very blunt: "You fool!" Then he made the important point that *resurrection is not reconstruction*. Nowhere does the Bible teach that, at the resurrection, God will "put together the pieces" and return to us our former bodies. There is *continuity* (it is *our* body), but there is not *identity* (it is not the *same* body).

Paul knew that such miracles cannot be explained, so he used three analogies to make the doctrine clear.

Seeds ([yy. 35-38](#), [42-48](#)). When you sow seed, you do not expect that same seed to come up at the harvest. The seed dies, but from that death there comes life. (See [John 12:23-28](#) for our Lord's use of this same analogy.) You may sow a few grains of wheat, but you will have many grains when the plant matures. Are they the same grains that were planted? No, but there is still continuity. You do not sow wheat and harvest barley.

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. If at the resurrection, all God did was to put us back together again, there would be no improvement. Furthermore, flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom. The only way we can enjoy the glory of heaven is to have a body suited to that environment.

Paul discussed the details of this marvelous change in [1 Corinthians 15:42-48](#). The body is sown (in burial) in corruption, because it is going to decay; but it is raised with such a nature that it cannot decay. There is no decay or death in heaven. It is buried in humility (in spite of the cosmetic skill of the mortician); but it is raised in glory. In burial, the body is weak; but in resurrection, the body has power. We shall be like Jesus Christ!

Today, we have a "natural body," that is, a body suited to an earthly environment. We received this body from our first parent, Adam: he was made of dust, and so are we ([Gen. 2:7](#)). But the resurrection body is suited to a spiritual environment. In His resurrection body, Jesus was able to move quickly from place to place, and even walk through locked doors; yet He was also able to eat food, and His disciples were able to touch Him and feel Him ([Luke 24:33-43](#); [John 20:19-29](#)).

The point Paul was making was simply this: The resurrection body completes the work of redemption and gives to us the image of the Saviour. We are made in the image of God as far as personality is concerned, but in the image of Adam as far as the body is concerned. One day we shall bear the image of the Saviour when we share in His glory.

[First Corinthians 15:46](#) 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!" He rejected Cain and chose Abel. He rejected Abraham's firstborn, Ishmael, and chose Isaac, the second-born. He rejected Esau and chose Jacob. If we depend on our first birth, we shall be condemned forever; but if we experience the new birth, we shall be blessed forever.

Flesh ([y. 39](#)). Paul anticipated here the discovery of science that the cell structure of different kinds of animals is different; and therefore, you cannot breed various species indiscriminately. The human body has a nature of one kind, while animals, birds, and fish have their own particular kind of flesh. The conclusion is this: 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? (Pet lovers take note: Paul did not teach here that animals will be resurrected. He only used them as an example.)

Heavenly bodies ([yv. 40-41](#)). Not only are there earthly bodies, but there are also heavenly bodies; and they differ from one another. In fact, the heavenly bodies differ from each other in glory as far as the human eye is concerned. Paul is suggesting here that believer may differ from believer in glory, even though all Christians will have glorified bodies. Every cup in heaven will be filled, but some cups will be bigger than others, because of the faithfulness and sacrifice of those saints when they were on earth.

These illustrations may not answer every question that we have about the resurrection body, but they do give us the assurances that we need. God will give to us a glorified body suited to the new life in heaven. It will be as unlike our present body in quality as the glory of the sun is unlike a mushroom in the cellar. We will use this new body to serve and glorify God for all eternity.

We must remember that this discussion was not written by Paul merely to satisfy the curiosity of believers. He had some practical points to get across, and he made them very clear in [1 Corinthians 15:29-34](#). If we really believe in the resurrection of the body, then we will use our bodies today to the glory of God ([1 Cor. 6:9-14](#)).

Finally, the lost will be given bodies suited to their environment in hell. They will suffer forever in darkness and pain ([Matt. 25:41](#); [2 Thes. 1:7-10](#); [Rev. 20:11-15](#)). It behooves us who are saved to seek to rescue them from judgment! "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" ([2 Cor. 5:11](#)).

If you have never trusted the Saviour, do so now—before it is too late!