

## Resurrection Bodies

1 Corinthians 15:35-58 | Jonathan K. Dodson | April 27, 2014

So far we have considered whether or not the resurrection is reliable, essential, and believable. This morning we pick up in this exploration of resurrection by examining what the resurrection body will be like. I hope you brought your 3-D glasses. This has the potential of being the most interesting sermons I have ever preached, not because I am interesting but because *God* is infinitely interesting. Here's my big assertion this morning: *what you believe about the future has a profound affect on your behavior in the present.*

### Resurrection in Creation

Paul continues his extensive inquiry into the likelihood of resurrection by engaging in a mock dialogue with a skeptic, based on actual debate in Corinth. These Christians were probably influenced by Greek philosophy that denied the value of the body or perhaps by the Sadducees who only believed the Torah as Scripture (as a result they ruled out the prophets who spoke about resurrection). Paul responds by saying, "**You foolish person!**" (15:36). His response seems harsh but underneath this accusation he is likely thinking of Ps 53:1 "*the fool says in his heart there is no God.*" So he's not really name calling; Paul is acknowledging the important role of presuppositions—whether you presuppose God is alive or God is dead. They are things we all take for granted. Sadducees and secularists assume no resurrection; Christians assume resurrection. Last week we looked at where that secular presupposition gets you—you lose an ordered life, dignity in death, and hope for eternal life. Presuppositions matter. If we rule God out, we narrow the universe to exclude things like resurrection. But why should the skeptic give resurrection a chance? Paul responds by saying "**What you sow does not come to life unless it dies**" (15:36). Doesn't sound like a powerful argument at first, and we should remember we are dealing with 1<sup>st</sup> century thought not 21<sup>st</sup> C science, *but even still he makes an interesting point.* His point is not that seeds die, but that **in nature we observe a resurrection principle at work.** Seeds die to produce plants, trees, and acres of grass. Death flowers into new life. Resurrection is embedded into our daily life. Every night we go down into a sleepy death before we wake up to life, to a new day. He does a similar thing with bodies. Just as we see the principle of resurrection in creation, so also we see the variation of bodies or mass. There is remarkable diversity of bodies from scaly fish to fleshy humans to gaseous stars. The resurrection body is just one more variation. Do you see what's he doing here? He is showing us that resurrection is woven into creation, not merely by analogy but in botany & biology. He appeals to our understanding of the world so that, at the very least, we should admit the possibility of resurrection in principle and in body, which raises the question—what is the resurrection body like?

### Resurrection Bodies

Here he goes: "**What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body**" (15:43-44). We could put this whole section of verses under two headings: natural and spiritual bodies. The natural body, he says, is weak and perishable, which means corruptible and because of that it has a shelf life. The natural

body dies. We are keenly aware of this. We live in one of the most fit cities in America. Just drive by Town Lake any time of the day; we're home to Whole Foods, filled with organic, preservative-free foods. We're doing our hardest to prevent perishing, but are we just wasting our time? Paul says the natural body is "from the dust of the earth" contrasting it with the spiritual body that is "from heaven." Is he driving a wedge between the natural and spiritual? Should we, then, prioritize the heavenly body to get on with heavenly activities? This is a difficult question that requires nuance and affects our views on things like abortion, suffering, the Arts, intellectual life and virtue. Earlier in the letter he criticizes the church for being people of the flesh, who only drink milk. They are spiritual anemics (3). **They work hard on their bodies but are lazy in spiritual life.** Some of you need to hear that critique and take it in. *You spend way too much time on the perishing body. On the other hand, some of you don't spend enough time and need to care for your body better.* Why? When Paul says this body is "from the earth" he isn't commenting on its *origin*, as if to say "Stuff from earth is second class. What you really need is the heavenly." Rather, he is focusing, not on our origin, but on *substance*, the material make up of our bodies, which you may recall from Genesis was "very good." In fact, God did something with humanity that he did with nothing else. He breathed his divine spirit into the dust to bring us to life. The first Adam is "a living soul" or *psyche*. This word refers to the *whole person, not immaterial soul*. Now, how is this different from the spiritual body? It is raised in glory, referring to a different *quality* of body, like the stars differ from us, but we all have atomic mass. The spiritual body is imperishable, incapable of corruption, decay. You don't have to fend off death. The first Adam is a *living soul*, whereas "**The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.**" The first has to receive life but the second generates life. The first body is a battery but the second a powerplant. It generates a higher quality of physical, imperishable, eternal life. Where does the power come from?—the Spirit. The first receives the Spirit but the second is suffused by the Spirit. Fee: "**it is a body adapted to the eschatological existence that is under the ultimate domination of the Spirit.**" The Spirit doesn't merely animate this body; it is all over it. **The two bodies are different by degree, by exposure to the Holy Spirit of God.** So how does this farout explanation make a difference? Why not turn our backs to health, suffering, and evil? Well, the key is Paul's nuance. There is continuity and discontinuity between the natural and spiritual bodies. *First, discontinuity with the present body means that there is genuine hope for change in this world.* Without the promise of discontinuity, we are doomed to the continuous cycle of history—sin, death, evil smattered with occasional technological leaps that both interrupt and promote suffering. There is no real hope for change. History just is. No alternative future. The story of secularism removes resurrection, and therefore cuts hope out of the human heart. The best it can do is forget the past, and just move on striving for a day when medicine and technology cure everything. Modernism zealously pursues utopia in the now, minimizing the evil of back then. **But** the resurrection story narrates a future with a superior body, signaling a superior world, where we are not doomed to repeat history and will be delivered from the eternal rerun of sin, death, and evil. It rescues us from despair and it injects hope. It is not the hope of a radical discontinuity, where heaven is unrecognizable and bodies are replaced with ghosts. So, in developing a theology of the body, Paul is more nuanced than: physical-bad; spiritual-good. There is no room for being so heavenly minded that Christians are no earthly good. Why? Because there is not only discontinuity but also **continuity**. The biblical

vision of the future has similarity with the present. It paints a physical, embodied future, which means the present embodied life matters immensely. Arcade Fire asks: “[If there’s no music in heaven then what’s it for?](#)” (Here Comes the Night Time). If its not good enough for heaven then why enjoy it on earth? *Our belief about the future affects our behavior in the present.* And resurrection tells us that our experiences of enjoying a good book or a peaceful walk in the woods, the discovery of stirring music or delight in a friend or spouse, are all foretastes of an embodied future in a new creation. **Without this continuity, resurrection is escape. But resurrection is renewal,** suffusing earth with heaven, embodies existence dominated by the Spirit. In the secular story, however, the Arts, intellectual life and virtue are not from heaven, and have no future. They are hormonal, a way for us to pass the time. But if music is in the future, if bodies are even better, then art and babies matter, love and justice are echoes of eternity. *The resurrection of Jesus announces a destiny beyond death, and it is full of life, for those who hope in him.* “[Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven](#)” (48).

### Fit for the Future

Now, am I making this all up? Let’s see where Paul goes. He says: “[I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery.](#)” In other words, **you have to be fit for the future.** A square peg doesn’t fit in a round hole. Your body has to be outfitted to stand the never-waning presence of God’s full holiness and infinite beauty. How? When Jesus returns, and the trumpet of his coming is sounded, we will be changed/transformed. What will it look like? Decomposed atoms of bodies through out history rematerializing in a swirl of bodily glory and power, as the earth turns inside out and in a purifying display of new creation the future dimension of heaven overlaps with present dimension of earth? Sure. I don’t know, but I daydream about it. You should too. My son and I daydream about what it will be like to fly and teleport in the new creation. Go ahead, dream it up with a sanctified imagination because you cant out-imagine God. Behold, it is a mystery! But remember the future changes the present. If you really believe all this you will work, play, rest, serve, and create differently. If you think this is mind-bending then you are starting to grasp it. We can’t grasp the significance or mechanics of it all with thisworldly minds. Secular presuppositions are too narrow. But know this—**the resurrection promises Christ’s return, and Christ’s return promises resurrection**—an imperishable, immortal, glorious, body fit for a future with God. Paul is so amped he breaks out into inspired poetry, remixing the prophet Isaiah: “[Death is swallowed up in victory.](#)” “[O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?](#)” He does a victory dance on death’s grave. He’s taunting death because of his hope for life. He knows the future, so he lays himself out for the gospel in the present. Paul has a sanctified imagination that leads to radical sacrifice. Why? Because of the hope of immortality? No, that misses the point. Because the length of God’s love. Behind our bodily scrambles to look good and not die is an even deeper longing to be loved, noticed, admired. What we really want to know about the future, Moltmann says, is “**Will love endure?**” If God is love, then love will endure, and love is real. How do we know? Love has broken into the present in the person of Christ. No greater love has a man than to lay down his life. Jesus suffers and dies out of immense love for you, to secure a



future of bright hope and glory. Paul shows us that this future hinges on Jesus, **who takes on the sting of *death*, takes in the power of *sin*, and takes over the presence of evil...with his resurrection life!** It's a victory dance...and love sonnet. Scientist-theologian John Polkinghorne comments: "[Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it \(song of Solomon 8:7\)-- "Not even the waters of cosmic chaos nor the tumultuous breakers of human evil."](#) Thanks be to *God* who gives us the victory *through* our Lord Jesus *Christ*. What you believe about the future will affect your behavior in the present, which is why he concludes: [Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.](#) Amen.