

THE CERTAINTY OF THE RESURRECTION

15 Now, brothers, I remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you also received, on which also you stand,² and by which you are saved—if you hold firm to the word that we preached to you, otherwise you have believed in vain.³ I delivered to you as of first importance that which I also received, [namely,] that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures;⁴ and that he was buried; and that he has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures;⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.⁶ After that he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at the same time, most of whom are still alive, although some of them have fallen asleep [in death].⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.⁸ Last of all, as to a child born prematurely, he appeared to me also.⁹ I am the least of the apostles, someone who is not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace bestowed upon me was not in vain; on the contrary, I worked harder than all of them—not I myself, but the grace of God that was with me.¹¹ So then, whether it was I or they, this is what we preach and this is what you believed.

¹² Now if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised.¹⁴ But if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless.¹⁵ And we are even found to be bearing false testimony about God; because we testified concerning God that he raised Christ [from the dead], whom he did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.¹⁶ If the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.¹⁷ If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless, you are still in your sins.¹⁸ Furthermore, those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.¹⁹ If we have only hoped in Christ for this [present] life, [then] of all men we are the most to be pitied.

²⁰ But now [the fact is] Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep [in death].²¹ Since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man.²² Just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.²³ But each in his own turn: the first fruits, [which is] Christ; then those who belong to Christ when he appears [in glory].²⁴ Then [comes] the end, when he shall deliver the kingdom to God the Father, after he has abolished all dominion and all authority and power—²⁵for he must reign until [God the Father] has put all his enemies under his feet,²⁶ (the last enemy to be abolished is death;) ²⁷for [it is written], “he has put everything in subjection under his feet.” But when it says that everything has been put in subjection, it is evident that this does not include the one who subjected all things to him.²⁸ When all things have been subjected to him, then the Son himself will be in subjection to the one who subjected all things to him, so that God may be all in all.

²⁹ If there is no resurrection, what will those men do who are baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not actually raised, why then are men baptized on their behalf?³⁰ And why do we subject ourselves to danger every hour?³¹ I die every day—I swear by my pride in you, brothers, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord.³² If for [only] a human purpose I fought wild beasts in Ephesus, what benefit is it to me? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we will die.”³³ Do not be misled,

“Bad companions corrupt good morals.”³⁴Come to your right senses and do not sin, for there are some who have no comprehension of God—I say this to your shame.

³⁵But someone will say, How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body will they come? ³⁶O foolish one, that which you yourself plant does not come to life unless it [first] dies. ³⁷And when you plant, you are not planting the body that shall appear; but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or some other grain. ³⁸But God gives it a body just as he pleases, and to each [kind of] seed he gives its own body.

³⁹All flesh is not the same. Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another kind, birds have another kind, and fish have still another kind. ⁴⁰There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another kind. ⁴¹The sun has one kind of splendor, and the moon has another kind, and the stars have still another kind of splendor—even star differs from star in splendor. ⁴²And so it is with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is planted decays, what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³It is planted in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is planted in weakness, it is raised with power. ⁴⁴What is planted is a physical body, what is raised is a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵Just as it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living being.” The last Adam is one who is a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶However, it is not the spiritual body, but the physical, that comes first, then comes the spiritual. ⁴⁷The first man was formed out of the dust, the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸Those who are made of dust are just like the man formed out of the dust; those who are heavenly are just like the heavenly man. ⁴⁹Just as we have borne the image of the man formed out of the dust, we will also bear the image of the heavenly man.

⁵⁰Now I tell you this, brothers, flesh and blood are not able to inherit the kingdom of God; neither can that which decays inherit what is imperishable. ⁵¹Listen, I will tell you a mystery. Not all of us will fall asleep [in death], but all of us will be transformed—⁵²in a moment of time, in the blinking of an eye, at [the sounding of] the last trumpet. The trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised [to an] imperishable [existence], and we will be transformed. ⁵³This body that decays must clothe itself with what is imperishable; indeed, this mortal body must clothe itself with what is immortal. ⁵⁴When this that decays has clothed itself with what is imperishable and this that is mortal has clothed itself with what is immortal, then the word that has been written will be fulfilled, “Death has been devoured by victory.” ⁵⁵Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; knowing that your labor for the Lord is not in vain. (1 Cor. 15:1-58)

Introduction

Sir Isaac Newton was a leading scientist of the 18th century—he was also a devout Christian. One day someone asked him how he, as a scientist, could believe in the resurrection of the body. In reply, Newton took a handful of metal shavings and mingled them into a mound of sand. Then he took a strong magnet, held it over the

mound of sand, and proceeded to re-collect the metal shavings as they were “resurrected” and re-gathered out of the sand.

How can you believe in the resurrection of the body? That was the question some of these Corinthian Christians posed. As a matter of fact, some of them were even denying the future resurrection. Paul incredulously asks them, *"How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?"*

This is the issue with which the Apostle Paul is dealing here in 1 Corinthians 15. He is presenting arguments demonstrating the certainty of the final resurrection. As Paul instructs these Corinthian Christians, so we, too, must not be swayed by the fallacious arguments of those who would deny the resurrection. On the contrary, we must stand firm in our Christian faith and always abound in the work of the Lord, precisely because of the certainty of the final resurrection.

As we focus on this main theme of 1 Corinthians 15, let us consider the apostle’s arguments for the certainty of the resurrection.

I. Christ’s Own Resurrection is Evidence of the Final Resurrection (15:1-28)

It should be noted that the Corinthian Christians were not denying the personal resurrection of Christ; rather, they were denying the final resurrection on the last day. With this in mind, the apostle’s argument in verses 1-28 is as follows: If there is no resurrection of the dead, then that fact would rule out the possibility of Christ’s own resurrection, this is the thrust of verses 12-13,15-16,

Now if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised ... ¹⁵And we are even found to be bearing false testimony about God; because we testified concerning God that he raised Christ [from the dead], whom he did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶If the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. (1 Cor. 15:12-13,15-16)

Conversely, if Christ was raised from the dead, the fact of His resurrection proves that there is, in fact, the resurrection of the dead. In other words, Paul is pointing out that the fundamental, underlying question is this: Does God raise the dead, or doesn’t He?

The question is not, Can God raise one man (Jesus Christ,) or can He also raise many people (namely, all of humanity on the last day)? God has the power to raise as many of the dead as He chooses; but, **does** He raise the dead? That is the question under consideration. Again, the question is not, Can God raise those who have just died (like Christ,) or can He also raise those whose bodies have already decomposed? God has the power to raise the dead no matter what their state of

decomposition; but **does** He raise the dead? Again, that is the question under consideration.

The answer the apostle gives to this fundamental question is, Yes, God **does** raise the dead; the proof of this being the fact that He raised Christ, note verse 20a, "*But now [the fact is] Christ has been raised from the dead.*" God foretold the resurrection through the Old Testament prophets, as Paul implies from his statement, Christ was raised "*according to the Scriptures*" (vs. 4.) God revealed the resurrected Jesus to numerous eyewitnesses on numerous occasions (vs. 5-8.)

Not only is Christ's personal resurrection the **proof** that God does raise the dead, Christ's resurrection is also the **pledge** of our final resurrection on the last day (vs. 20-23.) Christ in His resurrection is "*the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep [in death]*"—i.e.; those Christians who have died (vs. 20b.) That is to say, there is a direct connection, a living, organic connection, between Christ's own resurrection and our resurrection.

Paul goes on to explain why there is this connection between Christ's resurrection and our resurrection (vs. 21-22.) Originally, it was through one man (Adam) that death entered the world—by virtue of Adam's disobedience, all those whom he represented and who were united to him, became involved in sin and suffered the consequence, namely, death. Likewise, it is through one man (Jesus Christ) that there comes the resurrection from the dead—by virtue of Christ's obedience, all whom He represents and who are united to Him, become involved in His righteousness and the benefit of that righteousness, namely, life. In verse 23 Paul informs us of the divinely established timetable: Christ has the honor of being personally and individually resurrected as the first fruits; then, at Christ's return, all who belong to Him shall be resurrected to share fully in His resurrection life.

Thus the Apostle Paul's first argument for the resurrection is this: Christ's own resurrection is the evidence and assurance of our final resurrection.

NOTE ON 1 CORINTHIANS 15:28

In this verse Paul looks to that time when the promises specified in verses 23-26 have been fulfilled and all things have been absolutely subjected to Christ (the Messiah). Then, at that time, "*the Son himself will be in subjection to the one who subjected all things to him.*" That is to say, the Son Himself—in His capacity as the incarnate Messiah—will be subject to God by virtue of the fact that at "*the end*" He will deliver the kingdom unto God the Father (vs. 24). The purpose of this act is described in these terms: so that "*God may be all in all.*" The final consequence of these events is not that the Son becomes eternally subordinate to the Father. On the contrary, at "*the end*" there shall be the restoration of the eternal union of the Son

with the Father, even as Jesus prayed in John 17:5, *“And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”*

II. The Natural World Bears Witness to the Final Resurrection (15:35-49)

In verse 35 Paul anticipates the obvious question, How are the dead raised? What sort of body will they have? Paul is addressing the question, How can a disintegrated corpse be raised back to life? What will it look like? What may at first appear to be a rational and legitimate question is defined by the apostle as the question of a fool (vs. 36.)

In verses 36b-38 the apostle provides the answer to this anticipated question by pointing to the everyday processes of sowing and reaping: *“that which you yourself plant does not come to life unless it [first] dies.”* When you plant a seed, its husk breaks open and disintegrates; the living material in the seed eventually reappears as the fruit of the planted seed. The point Paul is making is this: disorganization precedes reorganization; the planted seed decomposes and is then recomposed into a new “resurrected” form. Paul goes on to say, *“when you plant, you are not planting the body which shall appear; but just a seed, perhaps of wheat, or some other grain.”* There is a distinction between what is initially planted and what is finally reaped, even though there is a direct and intimate connection between the seed and the fruit. What is initially planted in the ground is insignificant (*“just a seed”*) compared to what is finally reaped at the time of harvest. *“God gives it a body just as he pleases, and to each [kind of] seed he gives its own body”* (vs. 38.) This whole process is under the dominion and at the discretion of God; and God carries out this “death and resurrection” process continuously throughout the plant kingdom.

The distinction between the future (resurrection) body and the present (earthly) body is attested to by the variety of bodies the Lord has created and that are evident in this present world (vs. 39.) If the Lord has created such a variety of bodies, all distinct from each other, as we see throughout nature, why is it surprising to think that the future (resurrection) body will be distinct and different from the present (earthly) body?

The superior glory of the resurrection body is evidenced by the varying degrees of splendor possessed by the bodies of this present creation (vs.40-41.) We see that the heavenly bodies differ from the earthly bodies in splendor in this present creation—by way of example, the sun, moon, and stars shine, while the rocks of the earth have a different glory. Even among themselves, the heavenly bodies differ in degrees of splendor: the sun shines brighter than the moon and the stars. By analogy, we should not be surprised to learn that the resurrection body will have a different glory, an all-surpassing glory, in comparison to the earthly body.

In verses 42-44a the apostle contrasts the future (resurrection) body with the present (earthly) body. Our present earthly body is planted as a perishable body, but it shall be raised as an imperishable body—a body that is no longer subject to death and decomposition. Our present earthly body is planted in dishonor, but it shall be raised in glory. The death and decomposition of our present earthly body is a humiliating experience, a consequence of the curse pronounced by the LORD upon sin. Speaking to Adam, after the fall, the LORD declared, *“By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground; for out of it were you taken; for you are dust, and unto dust shall you return”* (Gen. 3:19.) But our future resurrection body shall share in the divine glory of Christ the Holy One of God, of whom the Scriptures declare, *“You [the LORD] will not allow your Holy One to see decay”* (Acts 2:27b.) Our present earthly body is planted in weakness, but it shall be raised with power. Our present body is frail, as is evidenced by the fact that it succumbs to death; but our resurrection body shall partake of the dynamic power and life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our present earthly body is planted as a natural body, but it will be raised as a spiritual body. That is to say, our present body belongs to and has been designed for life in this present world; our resurrection body shall belong to and be designed for life in the kingdom of God, the kingdom that is ruled and filled by the Holy Spirit, (therefore, it is called *“a spiritual body.”*)

In verses 44b-45 the apostle is emphasizing the certainty of the resurrection body. *“If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body;”* if there is a body designed for life in this present creation, there will also most certainly be a body uniquely designed for life in the new creation. *“The first man, Adam, became a living being.”* Paul is referring to Genesis 2:7 and the fact that God created Adam out of the ground and gave him life, Adam became *“a living being:”* *“And Jehovah God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being”* (Gen. 2:7.) Paul now goes on to say, *“the last Adam [Jesus Christ] is one who is a life-giving Spirit”*—not only does Christ live in God’s new creation, but He has the ability to impart eternal life to us.

In verse 46 the apostle emphasizes the divinely ordained order. The natural body, designed for life in this present creation, precedes the spiritual body, designed for life in the new creation. Thus, with the exception of Christ (who, according to Hebrews 6:20, is our *“Forerunner,”*) the appearance of the spiritual body must await the appearance of the new creation. Referring to heaven, the writer of Hebrews declares, *“as a forerunner Jesus entered for us, having become a high priest forever”* (Heb. 6:20.) Verse 47 informs us that, while the natural man and the present creation may precede the spiritual man and the new creation in point of time, the latter is far superior to the former: *“the first man was formed out of the dust, the second man is from heaven.”*

Just as all of Adam’s descendents partake of this earthly existence, so all those who belong to Christ shall partake of His heavenly existence (vs. 48.) Verse 49

gives a word of assurance: Just as surely as we presently bear the image of our father Adam (and are identified with him); so shall we as believers in Christ bear the image of our heavenly Savior (and be identified with Him, note Philippians 3:20-21,

... our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹By the power that enables him to bring everything into submission to himself, he will transform the body [belonging to the present state] of our humiliation, so that it may be conformed to his glorified body. (Phil. 3:20-21)

The apostle's second argument for the resurrection is this: the fact that the natural world bears witness to the final resurrection.

III. Creation and Salvation Demand the Final Resurrection (15:29-34,50-58)

In verse 29 Paul raises the question, If the dead are not raised, why do they practice baptism on their behalf? His point is: Does not such a practice imply a belief in the resurrection? The soul of the deceased must have departed to some intermediate state where it awaits the resurrection of the body; otherwise, if it has gone to its eternal state there would be no sense in submitting to baptism for such a one. Note: Paul appears to be referring to a heretical form of baptism that some within the church may have been practicing. He does not condone the practice; rather he distances himself from it, (he speaks of *"those men"* who are baptized on behalf of the dead.) This may have been one of the matters he intended to address personally when he came to Corinth. Back in chapter eleven (vs. 34b) he had written, *"I will give instructions concerning the other matters when I come."* Paul is referring to the rest of the questions and problems that beset the Corinthian church, one of which may have been the heretical form of baptism referred to here in 1 Cor. 15.

But even this heretical form of baptism implies the final resurrection and stems from an understanding of the biblical view of the creation of man. Man was created as a unity of body and soul: *"And Jehovah God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being"* (Gen. 2:7.) The corruption of the body, together with the unnatural severance of soul and body, is part of the curse against sin. Following his transgression in the Garden of Eden, the LORD declared to Adam: *"By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground; for out of it were you taken; for you are dust, and unto dust shall you return"* (Gen. 3:19.) Note: All of Paul's argument in verses 29-34 is based upon this biblical view of the creation of man.

Not only creation, (that is to say, the fact that man was originally created a unity of body and soul,) but also redemption, demands the resurrection of the body; because, as Paul argues in verse 50, *"flesh and blood are not able to inherit the*

kingdom of God." It is impossible for our earthly body in its present form to dwell in the kingdom of God—the reason being the fact that it is impossible for *"that which decays"* to inherit *"what is imperishable."* Simply stated, that which is subject to decay and decomposition cannot exist in the realm of the eternal. Consider the present experience of men when they encounter the immediate presence of God, (which shall be the chief characteristic of life in the kingdom of God): There was Daniel's experience when he was confronted with the immediate presence of Christ: *"How can I, your servant, talk with you, my Lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe"* (Dan. 10:17.) There was the Apostle John's experience when he had an encounter with the immediate presence of Christ: *"When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead"* (Rev. 1:17.)

Consider, too, the character of the kingdom of God and life in that eternal kingdom. According to Matthew 13:43, *"the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father;"* redeemed shall share in the glory of Christ Himself. At the time of His transfiguration, our Lord's appearance is described in these terms: *"There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light"* (Matt. 17:2.) For us to handle such an experience our present bodies must undergo the resurrection transformation. By way of illustration: just as our present earthly body is not suited to survive in space, how much less is it suited for the immediate presence of God in His eternal kingdom! Thus, if we are to inherit the kingdom of God, our bodies must undergo a transformation. Note: The resurrection is not only a return from the grave and a reuniting of the body and soul; it is also a transformation, so that we may be enabled to experience life in the kingdom of God. In verse 53 the apostle once more explains the reason and the necessity for this transformation of the body. If we are to survive in the atmosphere of God's immediate presence and enjoy the blessedness of His presence, we must share in Christ's own incorruptible and immortal being.

Finally, in verse 58, the apostle presents the practical application of these things. In light of the certainty of the resurrection, we are to be *"steadfast [and] immovable;"* we are to continue to place our faith in Christ and not forsake Him. We are to be *"always abounding in the work of the Lord."* We are to serve the Lord in the common duties of life, note Colossians 3:23-24, *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, ²⁴since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."* We are to employ our spiritual gifts in service to Christ and His church, as well as be involved in the advancement of the gospel and the cause of Christ in the world.

Here, then, is the apostle's third argument for the future resurrection: the fact that both creation and redemption demand the resurrection.

Conclusion

In verse 34 the apostle exhorts these Corinthian Christians to come back to their senses, for they who deny the future resurrection *"have no comprehension of God."* Such people are like the Sadducees, of whom the Lord Jesus said, *"You do not know the Scriptures or the power of God"* (Mk. 12:24.) Likewise, we must not be swayed by the fallacious arguments of those who would deny the future resurrection of the body.

Recognizing the certainty of the resurrection as it is expounded in 1 Corinthians 15, let us heed the command of verse 58, *"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; knowing that your labor for the Lord is not in vain."*