

# IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH?

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Many people are fascinated with what have been referred to as near-death experiences. Numerous books and TV programs have explored the stories of those who tell of life beyond death. Some people talk about a momentary release from the body as they lay on an operating table while medical personnel frantically tried to revive them. Others testify of serious accidents that momentarily seemed to break the grip of this life.

While these stories are inconclusive and arguable, we have convincing evidence that there is life after death—the record of what happened after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In this booklet, research editor Herb Vander Lugt explores the record and the significance of these events as discussed by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15.

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## WHAT IS THE EASTER EVENT?

The Bible tells us that one Friday almost 2,000 years ago, Jesus of Nazareth died on a cross and was buried before sunset. But it also records that He left the tomb on Sunday morning. That, according to Christians ever since, is the event of Easter. But not everyone would agree.

Rev. David Rankin, the former pastor of a large church here in Grand Rapids, has a different view of Easter. He told the religion editor of the *Grand Rapids Press* that he experienced the Easter event more than 30 years ago when he received a phone call informing him that his father had just died. He said that after the initial shock and feeling of overwhelming numbness, he gradually came to feel “an

acceptance, with a purging and a healing, and a gradual drifting toward peace and understanding.” To him, this was “the Easter event.” It enabled him to believe that in some way “death is conquered; that love builds enduring monuments; that every life has a purpose in the fullness of time.”

These words may seem empty and meaningless to us, and Rankin admits as much: “My heavens, if I really believed a person was resurrected from the dead, I’d go around shouting it all over the place, wouldn’t I? I mean, that’s amazing. I wouldn’t just go to church and sing a few hymns.”

Rankin says that belief in a literal resurrection is old-fashioned, unscientific, and unsuited for today’s mindset. He insists that “dozens of cults” around the Middle East at the time Jesus lived were proclaiming heroes

who were born of virgins, who worked miracles, got themselves killed, and rose again. He therefore believes that the body of Jesus decayed like that of everyone else.

Rankin's talk about belief in a literal resurrection as old-fashioned and unscientific may upset believers who haven't studied the evidence. This view, however, that "dozens of cults" proclaimed a virgin-born, dying, and death-conquering redeemer has been shown false by C. S. Lewis and many others who are well-versed in the legends and myths of ancient times. But what he said about getting excited if he believed in a literal resurrection really had an impact on me. I say that I believe it. And I really do. But I don't go around "shouting it all over the place." Like most of my Christian friends, I "go to

church and sing a few hymns" instead of reflecting the excitement and joy this belief should produce.

Christians for almost 20 centuries have been declaring that the Easter event is the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave. They lived and died believing that they too would someday be brought back from death in a real body. This faith changed lives in the past. It still does today. This faith made heroes in the past. It still does today. Millions of believers throughout history have chosen to die as martyrs rather than deny their faith.

We believe that the Easter event is a real historical occurrence with great significance for all of us today. Believing or not believing in it is a life-or-death matter. It determines our eternal destiny.

## WHAT DOES RESURRECTION MEAN?

When Christians talk about their future resurrection, they think of coming back from death in a real body, the same person they were when they died but just transformed.

Our future resurrection is not to be confused with the resuscitation of a corpse. That's what occurred with Lazarus (Jn. 11) and in several other New Testament instances. In these cases, the life process that had stopped started going again in a manner somewhat similar to what occurs today when people are brought back from clinical death. The resuscitation of Lazarus was a tremendous miracle because he had been dead 4 days. But he died again.

The Christian hope of

resurrection is also far more than living forever in a ghostlike form. Cartoonists often depict the dead as floating about in space, their insubstantial form bearing some resemblance to their physical appearance on earth.

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***Resurrection  
must not be  
confused with  
resuscitation.***

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What we anticipate is living again in real bodies, knowing who we are, and recognizing one another. Yet this new body, which Christians anticipate, will not be an exact replica of the one we have now. We believe, on the basis of what we read in the New Testament, that it will possess powers unknown

today. We won't need telephones to communicate or vehicles to go from one place to another. The new body will be perfectly suited for life in a new sinless environment—heaven.

To summarize, the God who originated life and invented biochemistry touched the cold, dead body of Jesus with His creative power. It was transformed into a perfect instrument for His immortal human spirit, passing through the grave clothes without unwrapping them and the sealed tomb door without opening it. One day, God will again use His creative power to give all of His children a body like the one Jesus received at His resurrection and in which He lives today.

I know this seems too wonderful to be true. I also confess that we who believe it aren't shouting from the housetops or displaying the joy we should. But the Bible

tells us that this is precisely what every believer can anticipate. Moreover, it gives us solid reasons for believing what it says. And one of the most comprehensive treatments of the subject of our future resurrection is found in 1 Corinthians 15. The remainder of this booklet will focus on this important passage.

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# CHRIST'S RESURRECTION AND OUR DESTINY

Jesus Christ came back from the grave in a real body, and so will all those who believe on Him. That's the essence of what the apostle Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 15. He dealt with the subject of resurrection with much detail because some church members in Corinth were saying that Christians should not expect a bodily resurrection after death. We don't know exactly what position they took regarding life after death. They probably taught that the soul or spirit of a believer lives on in heaven. We say this because it doesn't seem that people who believed that death ends everything would have been drawn to the Christian faith. It offered little by way of advantage in

this world. In fact, the people who professed faith in Jesus Christ were the objects of scorn.

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## *Why would certain church members in Corinth not believe in the literal resurrection of Christ?*

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We can assume, then, that these professing Christians in Corinth believed in God, saw the death of Jesus Christ as paying the price for their sins, and professed faith in Him. But they must have carried into their new faith some wrong ideas from their pagan background. They had been taught that matter is evil and that at death we are released from the physical and taken into a

purely spiritual form of existence—a definite improvement. They apparently tried to incorporate these pagan ideas into their Christian faith. This led them to teach that a future bodily resurrection is both impossible and undesirable.

Paul set out to correct this wrong thinking. He did so in six steps. First, he showed them that Jesus Christ did come back from death in a real body (vv.1-11). Second, he explained how important it is to believe in the resurrection—that a denial of resurrection is a denial of the whole Christian message (vv.12-19,29-34). Third, he pointed out the vital connection between Christ's resurrection and the assurance of the Christian's resurrection (vv.20-28). Fourth, he emphasized the continuity and diversity of believers' resurrection bodies (vv.33-

38). Fifth, he set forth some of the characteristics of our new bodies (vv.39-49). And finally, he concluded with a shout of triumph and a ringing challenge (vv.50-58).

## **A VERIFIABLE EVENT (1 Cor. 15:1-11)**

*Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once,*

*of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed (vv.1-11).*

The first point Paul hammered home was this: “We know that Jesus came back from death in a resurrected body. Since this is a recent historical fact, no one has a right to say that a

bodily resurrection is either impossible or undeniable.” He reminded his readers of the message they had heard when they professed faith in Christ. It was the message that Jesus Christ died, paid the price for sin, was buried, and rose again just as the Old Testament Scriptures had prophesied. He also reminded them of some things they undoubtedly had heard before, how that Jesus after His resurrection had made many appearances to His followers. He didn’t attempt to give a complete review of the appearances of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. He singled out Christ’s meeting with three individuals—Peter, James, and Paul himself. Then he mentioned two visits of Jesus to the apostles and one to a group of more than 500 people.

It’s interesting to note that Paul regarded his Damascus-road experience

as a valid personal encounter with the risen Christ, not as a mere vision. Faced with the apostles' personal testimonies, the heretics probably did not know what to say. They knew that Paul and the others were not liars. They could not produce evidence that the people who testified about their meetings with Jesus after His resurrection were mistaken. They had little choice but to acknowledge that Jesus Christ was resurrected in a real body. This in turn confronted them with a defect in their reasoning. They had thought that resurrection from death was scientifically impossible and philosophically undesirable. By acknowledging that Jesus Christ rose from the grave, they were proving themselves wrong in their idea that a physical resurrection is an impossibility. Furthermore,

by admitting that Jesus came back from death in a real body, they were refuting the idea that the body is inherently evil. God wouldn't have given Jesus Christ a new body if He viewed it as something evil.

These people were living too close to the time of Christ's resurrection to effectively deny it. There were too many people around who could testify that they had seen the risen Christ. They simply could not explain away this great historical event any more than a person today can effectively deny the reality of the Holocaust. There are people today who try to deny the Holocaust, but they don't get very far. Why? Mainly, because there are still many survivors of the Nazi concentration camps. In 1981, 10,000 of these survivors held a 4-day gathering in Jerusalem. In an interview, Ernest

Michael, a survivor of the Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps, held up his hands and said, “These hands have carried off [for burial] more corpses than I care to remember. And some say that the Holocaust never happened! We know; we were there!”

The people to whom Paul wrote were living far closer to the time of Christ’s resurrection than the people who met in Jerusalem in 1981 were to the Holocaust they survived. You and I, of course, are almost 2,000 years away from the resurrection. We can’t talk to eyewitnesses like the people to whom Paul originally wrote his letter. How can we be assured that it really happened?

We can be certain because we have the written record of people who were there when it happened. The New Testament was written by first-century people—

most of whom saw Jesus after His resurrection. This is something Christians always believed but could not prove.

In the 1800s and early 1900s, critics of the Bible claimed that the resurrection accounts came from the pens of men who lived during the 2nd and 3rd centuries. They spoke of these accounts as myths. But the critics can’t honestly make that claim today. In recent years, manuscript copies of New Testament portions have been found that prove it was written when the contemporaries of Jesus Christ were still alive.

William Albright began his studies with the assumption that New Testament documents gradually developed over a period of several centuries. But he came to a different conclusion after studying the evidence. He declared, “There is no longer any solid

basis for dating any book of the New Testament after AD 80" (*Recent Discoveries In Biblical Lands*, p.136).

Another scholar who changed his mind after careful research was John A. T. Robinson. For many years he assumed that the New Testament was written long after Christ's time. He decided he would

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***Were the men  
who recorded  
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deliberate liars?***

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do some investigation on his own. He was stunned by what he discovered. He came to the conclusion that the men he had respected had not been honest with the evidence. He decided

that all the New Testament books, including the writings ascribed to the apostle John, were written before AD 54, an earlier date than most evangelical scholars had given. He had so much confidence in his conclusion that he wrote an article in *Time* magazine in which he challenged his colleagues to prove him wrong (March 21, 1977).

The evidence is in. The men who wrote the New Testament accounts of Christ's resurrection were around when it happened. We must believe what they wrote or think of them as gullible fools or deliberate liars. Gullible fools? Read the entire New Testament and draw your own conclusions. Deliberate liars? Not a chance! A conspiracy to deceive people breaks down when the people involved start getting into trouble.

Chuck Colson, who was

arrested and imprisoned for playing a role in the Watergate conspiracy, said that as the scandal began to unravel, the conspirators, one by one, began to lay blame on each other. Loyalty went out the window! Each man was determined to protect his own hide. But with the apostles it was different. They faced something more serious than brief prison terms. One by one they were executed. But not one of them ever said, "We have been lying." Not one of them said, "We were deluded." Their behavior was that of sane men who knew and believed that what they were saying was true.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a verifiable historical event. You may ask, "If this is so, why do so many leading intellectuals disbelieve it?" One reason is moral. They do not want to believe because this belief

carries with it moral demands. They prefer to live by their own standards rather than submit to standards set by a holy God. The popular thing to do these days is to ignore the evidence, bypass all serious

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***The behavior of the apostles was that of sane men who knew and believed that what they were saying was true.***

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inquiry, and present imaginary accounts of Christ's life. Hugh Schonfield and Gore Vidal have written books about Christ that are hailed as great by the secular media. They portray Jesus as a dishonest and immoral man, and lightly dismiss the authentic accounts written by people who knew Him.

This is willful unbelief.

A second reason many scholars refuse to give serious thought to the resurrection accounts stems from the human desire to be in step with the thinking of the time. Young people like to be with the “in” crowd. In secular colleges you get the best grades and the greatest applause if you go along with current thought. By and by, such people tend to abandon all ideas that a supernatural resurrection is even a possibility. Like an alcoholic who comes to the place where he sincerely thinks another drink will do him no harm, they drink at the fountain of secular thinking. They have no hope for eternity. They can find no abiding purpose or satisfaction in life. But they have so conditioned themselves that they will not even consider the possibility that Jesus Christ rose from death.

People do this to their eternal loss. The truth is that Jesus did come back from death. His resurrection is a verifiable event.

## **A CRUCIAL BELIEF (1 Cor. 15:12-19,29-34)**

*Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! (vv.12-17).*

There are two groups of people who refuse to believe in the resurrection of Christ and do so to their eternal harm: professed unbelievers, and those who say they believe in Christ but reject the teaching that believers will be resurrected in real bodies. As noted earlier, some church members in Corinth were doing this. Some church leaders do so today. They say that the idea of a second coming of Christ and a bodily resurrection for all is outdated. But the apostle Paul made it clear that a person who does not believe in the resurrection of believers, no matter what the reason, is invalidating the entire gospel message.

We must take the same view of Christ's resurrection in the past as we do of our resurrection in the future. If Christ's resurrection was real, ours will be too. If future resurrection for believers is impossible or undesirable,

the same must be said about the reported resurrection of Christ. And once the possibility or desirability of a bodily resurrection is denied, a process of reasoning is started that invalidates the gospel. Doubt is cast on either the intelligence or truthfulness of the apostles, and there is no reason for believing anything they wrote.

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***A person who does not believe in the resurrection of believers is invalidating the gospel message.***

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Paul wanted the Corinthians to see the serious nature of their error. They apparently thought they could deny a future bodily resurrection and still

retain the basic elements of the Christian faith— forgiveness of sin, the power of the Holy Spirit, and ultimate victory over sin and death. But Paul told them that this denial tore down the very foundation of New Testament salvation. Logic would demand that they reject the evidence of the apostles who told them that Christ had risen from the grave bodily. Their friends who had died in hope, perished. If the gospel only lasts until life ends, it is a bad bargain. “Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable” (vv.18-19).

After a brief digression (vv.20-28), Paul picked up this thread of thought again in verses 29-32:

*What will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they*

*baptized for the dead? And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!”*

To emphatically make his point that denying a future bodily resurrection of believers is tantamount to rejecting the entire apostolic message, Paul declared that such a view makes becoming a Christian a foolish thing to do. He first referred to the fact that people were being “baptized for the dead.” This expression is difficult to understand. One scholar said that he has found between 30 and 40 explanations. I will mention only three.

1. Some believe that a large-scale epidemic had brought on the death of many Christians who died before they could be baptized. Friends or relatives were being baptized for them.

2. Paul may have meant simply that new converts were being baptized regularly, filling the place in the church left by Christians who had died.

3. Another possibility is that Paul used the Greek preposition *huper*, which is translated “for,” with the causal meaning “because of.” In other words, people were being baptized (or saved) because of the testimony of Christians who had died.

No one knows for sure what Paul was referring to, but his point is clear: Baptism is foolish if we don't believe in the reality of our resurrection.

Paul then said that he

would be a fool to face the threat of death every day if he didn't have the hope of resurrection. If the gospel is not true and we have no real basis for hope, we might as well live by the philosophy, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!” (v.32).

This suggests another reason why resurrection belief is so crucial. Apparently, those Corinthians who abandoned the belief of resurrection, abandoned other important teachings of the Bible as well. They began to go back to some of their old pagan ways and even became involved in immorality. They became bad companions. They gave evidence that they had never really come to know God. To them Paul shouted a word of warning:

*Be not deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits.” Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have*

*the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame (1 Cor. 15:33-34).*

Paul said that the gospel message is a unit of truth. Christ Jesus died for our sins. He rose again and appeared to many. If you deny that Jesus died to pay the price for sin, you have no forgiveness. If you deny that He rose from the grave, you lose all basis for hope.

I once asked a fellow minister what he believed about the meaning of Christ's death and the reality of His resurrection. He said he couldn't believe that God punished Jesus for our sins and he didn't think Jesus rose in a real body. He did believe, however, that something happened that convinced the apostles that their Lord had conquered death. So he said that he could in good conscience proclaim that in the end, life will conquer death. His answer would not have

satisfied Paul. The apostle would have rebuked him as a heretic for failing to take the apostles at their word. Belief in the resurrection is a matter of life or death. Deny it and you have no salvation or hope.

## **A VITAL CONNECTION (1 Cor. 15:20-28)**

*But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming (vv.20-23).*

Paul declared that there is a vital connection between Christ's resurrection and our hope for resurrection. His

resurrection is God's pledge that we will experience a similar miracle.

Believers converted from Judaism knew exactly what Paul had in mind when he spoke of our Lord's followers being "the firstfruits." Under the Mosaic law, they went into the field just before gathering the main harvest, reaped a small part of it, and presented it in the temple as an expression of gratitude and an indication of their confidence that a harvest of the same grain would soon be gathered in. The harvest Paul had in mind when he used the term *firstfruits* includes all believers—those who "have fallen asleep" (v.20) and those who will be alive "at His coming" (v.23). In our present bodies we are like Adam who sinned, and therefore we will die. But through faith in Jesus Christ, we will be like Him in resurrection.

We are the harvest of which He is the firstfruits.

Notice Paul's statement, "But each one in his own order." Our resurrection will not occur immediately when we die. It will take place at His coming—His return. When believers die, they go to be "with Christ," said Paul in Philippians 1:23, and he declared that it is "far better" than life on earth. The Bible doesn't give us a detailed description of this time between death and resurrection. The believing dead are "with Christ." That's all we need to know to be assured that it is a condition of blessedness. But it is never portrayed as the "blessed hope" or the goal of our salvation. The hope is always connected with the return of Jesus Christ when we will receive resurrection bodies.

When Christ returns, He will not be alone. With Him will be the spirits of all "who

have fallen asleep” (1 Th. 4:13). As “the voice of an archangel” and “the trumpet of God” sound out, these spirits will receive their new bodies (v.16), and in the next moment believers still living on earth will receive their resurrection bodies. In resurrected bodies we will meet the Lord in the air and be with Him forever (v.17).

We live “in Christ” today. We will be “with Christ” when we die. We will still be “with Him” after we are resurrected. Once we belong to Him we are never separated from Him.

But Paul didn’t stop with our resurrection. He looked beyond that wonderful event to the goal of everything, to the eternity in which the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—will be everything to everyone.

*Then comes the end,  
when He delivers the  
kingdom to God the  
Father, when He puts*

*an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For “He has put all things under His feet.” But when He says, “all things are put under Him,” it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:24-28).*

After Jesus Christ as the Mediator and God-man has ruled over the earth for 1,000 years (with His resurrected people sharing in His rule), He will cast the devil into the eternal lake of fire. The present earth will be completely destroyed by fire and replaced by the new heavens and new earth

(Rev. 20:22). Christ's work as Mediator-King over earth will be completed. Then He will submit Himself in His obedient manhood to God the Father and resume the place He had in the Trinity before He was born on earth. Yet He will always remain in heaven as the God-man in a body of which ours will be similar. All through eternity, a vital connection between us and our Savior will endure.

## **A PERSONAL CONTINUATION (1 Cor. 15:35-38)**

*But someone will say, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?" Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases,*

*and to each seed its own body (vv.35-38).*

In resurrection we will still be who we are now. This is so much better than what the New Agers offer in their reincarnation teaching. They hope to come back as new individuals. The Christian faith assures us that in heaven we will remember and recognize. The very fact that we will stand at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10) and be judged according to what we have done in the body clearly indicates that we will still be who we are now, and that we will remember what we did during our earthly pilgrimage.

Paul made two points in verses 35-38. First, he illustrated the principle of continuity. Then he dealt with the mind-boggling concept of diversity—that each of us will be a little different from everyone else who is there.

The principle of continuity was illustrated in the seed. We take a kernel of corn or a sunflower seed and plant it in the soil. In the ground it decays, but it springs forth as a plant. The kernel of corn becomes a cornstalk. The sunflower seed becomes a sunflower plant.

When people die, their bodies will decay. But when Jesus Christ comes, these bodies will come to life again. And we will all be the same people we were on earth. Remember, the sunflower plant comes from a sunflower seed. There is continuity. And yet, the difference between the body we will have then and the one we have now will probably be as great as the difference between the sunflower seed and the plant.

Second, Paul hinted at the fact that each resurrection body will have

an element of individuality when he declared that God gives “to each seed its own body.”

We will retain our personal identity. We will be who we are even though the new body will be as different from the one we have now as a seed is from the plant it produces. And just as no two plants are exactly alike, we will not be a carbon copy of someone else. We will be a unique person in every sense of the term.

## **A NEW BEGINNING (1 Cor. 15:39-49)**

While we will still be the people we were when we lived on earth, we will begin a brand-new existence. In our earthly bodies we sinned, suffered, and endured humiliation. No more! We will have a new splendor. We will enjoy a new perfection. And we will be designed to live in a new environment.

## **A New Splendor (vv. 39-42).**

*All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption (vv.39-42).*

Paul implied that our resurrection bodies will have a new splendor. He didn't describe them. Human language can't give an adequate description of heavenly and eternal realities. It can only speak

in generalities, using terms that mean something to us. Paul therefore pointed to the varieties of flesh on earth to tell us that the same God who created these varieties can create a superior kind of flesh for us. He also called our attention to the great varieties of bodies that surround us. What diversity! What splendor!

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Maybe Paul's reference to the many kinds of flesh on earth hints at the thought that our resurrection bodies will have flesh with such splendor that we will be able to do things we can't even

dream of doing today. Think of what Jesus did! He suddenly appeared. He suddenly disappeared. He could walk through closed doors. And He could traverse from earth to heaven at will.

The “celestial bodies” are undoubtedly the sun, moon, and stars. There is no reference to angels in this context, and it is doubtful that they possess bodies as we think of them. The “terrestrial bodies” are probably oceans, lakes, rivers, and mountains. Each body has its own unique beauty and splendor, whether celestial or terrestrial.

Paul’s reference to the degrees of glory between the stars may point to the differing degrees of reward that will result from our appearing at the judgment seat of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:10, we are told that “each one may receive the things done in

the body, according to what he has done.” This implies different degrees of glory.

In heaven we will all be equals and we will all be perfectly happy. But it is entirely possible that we will differ in the degree of glory we receive as a result of the judgment seat. Each of us will have his or her own splendor, and we will be perfectly happy with what we have.

**A New Perfection (vv.42-43).** Many people today are obsessed with physical fitness. Body building magazines encourage and try to illustrate the development of a perfect body. But no one has one. The bodies in which we live carry in them the seeds of death. They are subject to disabling diseases or accidents. And they cannot match those of many animals in strength or endurance. Our bodies can work very well for us when

we are healthy, but they are far from perfect. The cost of medical care in today's world gives eloquent testimony to this fact. The resurrection body, however, will carry none of the imperfections of the one we now have.

*The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power (vv.42-43).*

The body we receive in resurrection will be "incorruptible." It will not be subject to deterioration. After millions of years (as measured by our present earthly time) we will be just as strong and vibrant as at the moment of resurrection.

Today the process of deterioration begins early. Professional athletes peak at about 30 years of age. Even with today's medical knowledge, only a few people live more than a

century. Death comes. The body, which has been deteriorating for years, swiftly decays—a few years in this body, but forever in our resurrection body.

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***Our resurrection bodies will be incorruptible. They will be just as strong and vibrant millions of years after our resurrection.***

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The body we receive in resurrection will be marked by "glory," while "dishonor" is associated with the one we have now. The word translated "dishonor" in 1 Corinthians 15:43 is rendered "lowly" in Philippians 3:21. It is difficult to know exactly

what Paul had in mind. William Barclay writes, “It may be that he meant that in this life it is through our bodily feelings and passions and instincts that dishonor can so easily come to life; but that in the life to come our bodies will no longer be servants of passion and of impulse, but the instruments of the pure service of God, than which there can be no greater honor.”

Other commentators, like Godet and Hodge, view the term *dishonor* as referring to the humiliation people endure, when through old age or illness or accident they lose their faculties, become helpless, and need to be cared for like infants. In either case, the resurrection body will be far different. It will neither be an instrument of sin nor be subject to the humiliating physical impairments that so often precede death.

A third element in the

perfection of the resurrection body is that it will be “raised in power.” This is contrasted with our present weakness. We talk about people being strong, but this is a relative term. We are weak compared to many animals. Moreover, we can be killed by a fall, a drop of poison, a snake bite, a virus, and so on. We are so fragile. Our resurrection bodies will be powerful. It’s difficult to imagine what we will be

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***Our resurrection  
bodies will be  
powerful. It’s  
difficult to imagine  
what we will be  
able to do.***

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able to do. Since we will have bodies like Christ’s resurrection body, it’s likely that we will not need

telephones to communicate or vehicles to transport us or computers to store information for us. Just thinking about going somewhere will get us there. Just desiring information will bring it to mind. Our bodies, including the brain, will be characterized by power.

### **A New Design (1 Cor. 15:44-49).**

We now live in a body that is designed for earthly existence. The one we will receive in resurrection is designed for heaven.

*It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of*

*dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man (vv.44-49).*

Paul distinguished between the earthly and the heavenly body by using the words *natural* and *spiritual* (v.44). On the surface, this may seem to teach that the resurrection body will have no substance, that it will be pure spirit. But that isn't the case. The Greek word translated "spiritual" is *pneumatikos*. Adjectives that end in *ikos* carry a functional or ethical meaning. The resurrection body will not be made up of spirit. That's not what Paul was saying. Rather, it will be enlivened by the redeemed

human spirit. Our spirits will be in perfect tune with God and His will. Our body in heaven will respond perfectly to this redeemed spirit. In contrast, our present body is animated by and responds to earthly needs and desires. The rendering “natural” is right on target.

Paul developed the idea that our present bodies, being made of earth and designed for earth, are of a lower order than the one we will receive in heaven. We can probably assume that if Adam and Eve had not sinned, they would have reached the place where they would have been translated into their heavenly bodies. The body in which we now live is ours during our probationary period on earth. The choice that we make now determines whether we will remain forever on a lower level or rise to a higher life.

Our decision about Jesus Christ produces results both in the present and the future. Paul declared, “As is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly”

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***The choice that we make now determines whether we will remain forever on a lower level or rise to a higher life.***

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(v.48). Even though we are now subject to the temptations, pains, diseases, and deteriorating processes associated with our physical substance, we are already citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20). In Ephesians 2:6, we are told that we have been made to “sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” A realization of what

we now are in Christ certainly should make a great deal of difference in our lifestyle on earth.

Paul went on to depict our future state:

*As we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man (v.49).*

We will be perfectly designed for heaven because we will be just like our Savior.

## **A LIFE-CHANGING HOPE (I Cor. 15:50-58)**

Paul's discussion of the resurrection now reaches a magnificent climax. His heart is full. His mind is running in high gear. You can feel the pulse of excitement in his words. In verses 50-53, he began by summarizing what he had been saying.

*Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the*

*kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality (vv.50-53).*

In our present body as flesh-and-blood beings, we cannot enter the eternal heavenly kingdom of God. We must be changed. We must receive a new body. And we will! God revealed to Paul the wonderful truth that a day is coming when the trumpet of heaven will sound, which will signal the return of Jesus Christ. "In the twinkling of an eye" believers who have died will

receive their resurrection bodies and the living will be transformed from the earthly to the heavenly. All the redeemed will receive new, glorified bodies on that day! (See also 1 Th. 4:13-18.)

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***In our present body as flesh-and-blood beings, we cannot enter the eternal heavenly kingdom of God. We must receive a new body. And we will!***

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This thought caused Paul to burst forth in unbounded joy and exultation:

*So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written:*

*“Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (vv.54-57).*

The thought that the twin enemies of the human race—sin and death—will be totally conquered led the apostle to use graphic imagery. “Death is swallowed up in victory.” Jesus Christ, through His death and resurrection, has so completely defeated death that, on that day in the future, death will be “swallowed up.” It will be gone.

After this exultant expression of resurrection triumph, Paul taunted death. “O Death, where is your sting? O Death [Greek text], where is your victory?” The sting of death is sin, and the

strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (vv.55-57). The sting of death is sin because it is through sin that death came into the human race, and it is the awareness of sin that can make death a frightening experience. Moreover, it is by the law that sin gains strength—becomes rebellious. But in our place, Jesus Christ fulfilled the law by obeying it perfectly, and through His death He both

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***Jesus Christ won  
the victory over  
sin and death.  
And because He  
did, we will!***

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paid the price for our sins and broke death’s power. He won the victory over sin and

death. And because He did, we will! We need have no fear in the face of death! Praise God!

Paul closed his climactic section with a practical appeal. He had been teaching. He had been praising God. From theology and praise he turned to exhortation in the form of a challenge:

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (v.58).*

We have an indescribable glory to anticipate. In the light of this great expectation, we should persist in serving the Lord through thick and thin, gladly going beyond the call of duty. We can do this with the assurance that the reward will far outweigh the cost, no matter how deep the trials or how difficult the way.

# CHRIST'S RESURRECTION AND YOU

If you have read this booklet, you know what Christians believe about Christ's resurrection and its meaning for them. You also know that the first followers of Jesus were so convinced of His resurrection that they spread the message with tremendous zeal and at great cost. Furthermore, you know that even though they died as martyrs one by one, every one of them remained steadfast.

Consider the fact that first-century Jewish believers started worshiping on the first day of the week instead of the seventh to commemorate Christ's resurrection. And don't ignore the testimony of such secular historians of ancient times as Tacitus, Josephus, Suetonius, and Pliny the Younger that the church

was a powerful force in the Roman Empire by AD 64.

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*The gospel still  
changes lives and  
gives courage.  
Thousands of  
believers have died  
as martyrs during  
this century.*

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Reflect on the way simple people who believed were able to face torture and death for their faith. In AD 178 a Gallic slave girl, Blandina, was commanded to repudiate Christ or face torture and death. They murdered friends before her eyes. They heated her on a grid-iron. They threw her to wild beasts. They finally impaled her on a stake. She died praying for her tormentors. Her

testimony led a 15-year-old boy, Ponticus, to follow her example.

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***“As many  
as received  
Him, to them  
He gave the  
right to become  
children of  
God, to those  
who believe in  
His name.”  
John 1:12***

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The gospel still changes lives and gives courage. Thousands of believers have died as martyrs during the 20th century. In fact, according to missions expert David Barrett, there may have been as many Christian martyrs in the 20th century

as in all nineteen previous centuries combined.

Think about these facts. Admit that you are a dying person among dying people. Admit your sinfulness and need of forgiveness.

Believe on Jesus Christ. You have all the evidence and understanding necessary. Once you believe, you will become a child of God (Jn. 1:12), and you will receive the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). Your eyes will be opened. You will gain more understanding. Your life will be changed. And if you continue faithfully, you will become increasingly assured in your heart that you belong to Christ.

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