

Resurrection of the Body – Part 3 (1 Corinthians 15:35-49)

Expository Lessons from Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians

I. Introduction and Review

- a. This is part 3 of the teaching in **1 Corinthians 15** regarding the resurrection of the body.
- b. This will build on the foundation we laid in the first two parts. To recap:
 - i. While many Christians today believe that only our soul is saved, in the beginning, Christians understood that God’s plan is to save both our body and soul together.
 - ii. The teaching on the physical resurrection of the body was historically considered a foundational teaching of the Christian faith.
 1. It is one of the six things listed among the “elementary principles of Christ” in **Hebrews 6:1-3**.
 2. It is included in the Apostles Creed, an early statement of faith. If a believer did not assent to belief in the resurrection of the body, they would not be considered ready for baptism.
 3. Early Christian writer Tertullian, writing c. 210 AD, asserted that someone who denied the resurrection of the flesh *could hardly be considered to be a Christian!*
 - a. “...if the resurrection of the flesh be denied, that prime article of the faith is shaken...
 - b. “...He, therefore, will not be a Christian who shall deny this doctrine which is confessed by Christians...”
 - i. (Source: Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, chapters 2-3; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 547)
 4. While the resurrection of the body is mentioned throughout the New Testament, the teaching is most fully explained in **1 Corinthians 15**.
 - iii. Paul taught that each person consists of three parts: the body, soul and spirit. (**1 Timothy 5:23**)

1. While many imagine that the soul and spirit refer to the same things, the Scriptures make a distinction between the two (as in **Hebrews 4:12**).
2. As Irenaeus and other early Christian writers understood it:
 - a. Our God-given, human *spirit* (not the same as the Holy Spirit) tends to draw us upward spiritually, toward God.
 - b. Our *body*, also referred to as our *flesh*, tends to draw us downward, toward carnal desires.
 - c. Our *soul* is between the other two. It is pulled by them in opposing directions; and it must choose which way to go.
- c. If we follow Jesus, we will follow the same pattern.
 - i. After He died, His soul went to *Hades* while His body remained in the tomb (as Peter explained in **Acts 2:23-32**, quoting from **Psalm 15/16**).
 - ii. Upon his resurrection, His dead body was physically resurrected, transformed, and reunited with his soul.
 - iii. On the Last Day, also referred to as the Day of Judgment, all of the dead will be raised, their bodies and souls reunited, and all people will be judged at that time. (**Matthew 12:40-42**)
- d. The teaching on the resurrection of the body was controversial in Paul's day, among the Jews as well as the Gentiles. It remains controversial today.
 - i. The goal of this series of messages on the resurrection of the flesh, from **1 Corinthians 15**, is to give everyone a solid foundation on this teaching. It can also help equip us to explain this teaching to others, showing them from the Scriptures.
 - ii. In this third part on the topic, we will look at some of the questions people were raising to Paul, as well as some objections and questions that are raised today.

II. From the Beginning, Resurrection of the Body was a Controversial Teaching

- a. It was controversial to the philosophical types among the Gentiles.
 - i. They considered it a ridiculous, outrageous belief that the bodies of the dead would come back from the grave.

- ii. When Paul preached to the Areopagus, in Athens. Paul first challenged them on their idolatry and then moved on to discuss the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This teaching on the resurrection of the dead was particularly offensive to some who were listening to him.
 1. "...He [*God*] has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." *And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, 'We will hear you again on this matter.'* So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them." (**Acts 17:31-34**, NKJV)
- iii. When Paul was in trouble before the Jewish Sanhedrin, in Jerusalem.
 1. "But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, 'Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; *concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!*' And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For *Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.* Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, 'We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God.' Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks." (**Acts 23:6-10**, NKJV)
 - a. Paul was being very clever here, providing a wonderful example of Jesus' admonition that we be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (**Matthew 10:16**). He deliberately exploited the division among the Jewish leaders regarding belief in the resurrection of the dead.
 - i. The Sadducees *did not believe* in the resurrection of the dead.
 - ii. On the other hand, the Pharisees (and Jesus' disciples) *did believe* in it.
 - iii. The controversy was so great over this that it created a riot in the Sanhedrin.

III. Belief in the Resurrection of the Dead Among the Jews

- a. **Question:** Why did some of the Jews (including the Pharisees and the disciples of Jesus) believe that the dead would rise again? What in the Old Testament Scriptures led them to that conclusion?
- b. **Possible Answers:**
 - i. Perhaps they were familiar with the story of a Jewish mother and her seven sons who were tortured and killed during the time of King Antiochus, in **2 Maccabees**.
 1. Note that **2 Maccabees** is included in the *Apocrypha*, which some refer to as the *Deuterocanonical books* of the Bible. Those books were included in the original (1611) King James Version of the Bible and have always been in Catholic and Orthodox Bibles.
 - a. **2 Maccabees** is in the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Scriptures that Jesus and the apostles generally quoted from.
 - b. Example: **Isaiah 6:9-10**, which Paul quotes in **Acts 28** and Jesus quotes in **Matthew 13**. In both cases they are following the LXX, and the main point they are making is supported by the LXX but not by the Masoretic Text.
 2. Over the centuries, this story has inspired Christians facing severe persecution. A few years ago, I would have said I never expected to see major persecution here in North America in my lifetime. However, I can no longer say that. Therefore, we should be paying attention to stories like this and learning from them, so that we are better prepared if/when it comes here.
 - a. In the Parable of the Sower (**Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 8**), Jesus spoke of the two dangers believers would face.
 - i. Third soil: They are represented by seed sown in thorn-infested soil. They are choked by the cares, riches and pleasures of life, and never come to spiritual maturity.
 1. This is the greatest danger for most American Christians today.
 - ii. Second soil: They are represented by the seed sown in rocky soil, that “has no root”. They

believe for a while, but in time of testing
(persecution for the word's sake) they fall away.

- b. The story in **2 Maccabees 7**, describing the life and death of eight heroes of the faith, can be an inspiration to us and our children as well, to prepare us for the kind of extreme persecution we may someday be called to face. This story provides insights into what inspired them to stay faithful. They looked forward to their bodily resurrection.
3. Read **2 Maccabees 7:1-14** and **7:20-29**.
 - a. All seven brothers are bound and tortured for refusing to eat pig's flesh. They refused due to their reverence for the dietary restrictions in the Law of Moses, in **Leviticus 11**.
 - b. First of seven sons, the spokesman, says they are ready to die rather than to transgress the laws of their fathers. He has his tongue cut out, he is scalped, and his hands and feet are cut off. Then he is fried to death in a large pan, as his brothers and mother watch.
 - c. The second brother is treated likewise. Before dying, he cries out:
 - i. "...the King of this world will raise us to an everlasting renewal of life, because we die for His laws."
 - d. The third brother offers his tongue and hands to his torturers, and says, "I received these from heaven, and because of His laws I disregard them, and from Him I hope to get them back again."
 - e. The fourth brother also, facing death, speaks of his hope that God will raise him to life again, but warns his oppressors, "But for you there will be no resurrection of life."
 - f. Later, the mother urges her youngest son to resist the temptation to compromise his faith. She tells him to "look at heaven and earth and see everything in them, and know that God made them from nothing [and made men the same way]" and she urges him to accept death "that in God's mercy I may receive you back again with your brothers".

4. **Challenge:** Many today, on hearing this story, react: “Wow, I could *never do* something like that.” However, the reality is that each of us needs to get spiritually prepared so that *we can do that if ever called to!*
5. It is clear that these eight martyrs *really believed* that God *would raise their bodies from the dead*. This was not just some abstract philosophical concept to them.
 - a. The third brother said that he would receive back the tongue his oppressors cut out, and the hands they amputated from his body.
 - b. The mother saw that God had created everything that can be seen (including man) from nothing and believed he could (and would) raise the dead also.
 - c. But that still leaves the question: *Why did they believe this? What did these eight Jews see in the Old Testament Scriptures that convinced them that their dead bodies would be raised again?*
- ii. Perhaps their belief in the resurrection was based on one of the things said by the prophet Daniel.
 1. Read **Daniel 12:1-3**.
 - a. Many who “sleep” in the dust of the earth shall “awake”.
 - i. Note that *sleeping* and *waking from sleep* are often used figuratively in Scripture to refer to death and being raised from the dead (as in **Luke 11:11-15** and **Corinthians 15:51-52**).
 - b. This speaks of a universal judgment after a bodily resurrection. The righteous will be glorified.
 - i. “Those who understand” and “are righteous” will shine like the stars of the heavens and will receive everlasting life.
 - ii. In contrast, the unrighteous will face shame and everlasting disgrace.
 - iii. Early Christian writer Irenaeus, bishop of the church in Lyons, in Gaul, writing c. 180, pointed to the story of prophet Ezekiel, in the Valley of Dry Bones. (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 5, chapter 15; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 542)

1. Read **Ezekiel 37:1-14**.
 - a. In the LXX, the words translated here as “wind” and “Spirit/spirit” are the same Greek word.
 - b. The Lord shows the prophet Ezekiel that He can and will raise the dead bones back to life.
 - c. While many of the Jewish readers of this passage may have taken it figuratively, the early Christians like Irenaeus took the promises in this passage literally. The bones of the dead will be brought back to life. Their flesh will be restored, and they will come out of the tombs!

- iv. In the same writing just referenced, Irenaeus also pointed to two earlier prophecies, in **Isaiah**, regarding the resurrection of the dead.
 1. Read **Isaiah 26:19**.
 - a. “The dead shall *rise up*; those in the tombs shall *arise*....” (**Isaiah 26:19**, LXX, OSB)
 - b. In this passage in the LXX, the two Greek words used that are translated “rise up” (ἀνίστημι / anistemi) and “arise” (ἐγείρω / egeiro) are the same two words used throughout the gospels in referring to the *resurrection* of Jesus.
 2. Read **Isaiah 66:14**.
 - a. “You shall see, and your heart will rejoice. Your bones shall *rise up* like a pasture....” (**Isaiah 66:14**, LXX, OSB)
 - b. In the LXX, where it says, “your bones shall *rise up*” the Greek word for “rise up” (ἀνατέλλω / anatello) is the same word used in the New Testament where it speaks of the sun “rising up” (**Mark 4:6**, **James 1:11**).
 - i. Therefore, the picture is that *our bones* will rise up out of the earth as the sun rises, and as grass rises up out of the earth in a pasture in the spring.

- v. There is one person in the Old Testament who is even earlier, who figured out that God would raise the dead back to life: Abraham, the father of faith.

1. Abraham saw God as “the Creator of heaven and earth” (**Genesis 14:22**). In **Genesis 15**, the Lord promised Abraham, childless at the time, that he would have descendants as numerous as the stars in the heavens (**Genesis 15:4-8**), who would inherit the land.
2. After Isaac was born, the Lord told Abraham that his seed *would be reckoned through Sarah’s son Isaac*, rather than through his maidservant’s son Ishmael. (**Genesis 21:12**)
3. Yet in **Genesis 22**, Abraham’s faith was put to the ultimate test, when God told him to sacrifice his son, Isaac, on the mountain.
 - a. Read **Genesis 22:1-5** and **22:10-12**.
4. In **Hebrews 11**, we find out what Abraham was thinking.
 - a. Abraham is famous for being the “father of faith” to all who believe (**Romans 4:16**). In **Hebrews 11**, Abraham is held up for his faith first for going to an unknown land when called by God, and then for believing the Lord that he and Sarah would have a son in their old age. However, the ultimate test of his faith was when he was called to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac.
 - b. Read **Hebrews 11:17-19**.
 - c. True *saving faith* is defined in **Hebrews 11** by reviewing many Old Testament examples. It involves believing something you can’t (yet) see. (**Hebrews 11:1**)
 - i. It involves *obeying God’s commands and heeding His warnings* (like Noah, in **Hebrews 11:7**).
 - ii. It involves *pleasing and seeking God* (like Enoch, in **Hebrews 11:5-6**).
 - iii. It involves *persevering* through suffering, to the end (like Moses, in **Hebrews 11:24-28**).
 - iv. It also involves *believing in something you can’t see*, as Abraham believed that God could and would raise the dead.
 - v. *Saving faith* is much more than the simple belief of an instant. It is not just having a feeling or taking a ‘leap of faith’ into the unknown. It is

consistent with reason, as we see in the example of Abraham.

d. Abraham passed the test of faith because He knew God and *reasoned* the following:

- i. God promised that I would have many descendants through Isaac.
- ii. He just told me to slay my young son on the mountain.
- iii. God always keeps His promises.
- iv. God is the Creator of heaven and earth. Therefore, He can do *anything*.
- v. Reasoning it out, God must be planning to raise Isaac from the dead after I slay my son.

1. Therefore, God raises the dead!

e. We see here that *faith and reason work closely together*. Abraham's faith in the resurrection was something he could not (yet) see, but it was logical and based on things he already knew were true.

5. [**Note:** After I gave this lesson, Mark Felsher shared with me that his wife Linda pointed out to him that we can know what Abraham was thinking (his belief in the resurrection of the dead) *even in the **Genesis** account*.

a. "Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. Thus Abraham said to the young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder to worship, and *we will come back to you*.'" (**Genesis 22:4-5**, LXX, OSB)

b. In his telling the young men, "we (both Abraham and his son) will come back to you," we can see that Abraham believed the Lord would raise up his son after he was slain.]

vi. Read **Hebrews 11:32-35**.

1. "Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection".

2. **Question:** Who do you think of when you read this statement? Who were the “*others*” among those in the “great cloud of witnesses” that the **Hebrews** writer was referring to?

IV. *How Will the Dead Be Raised?*

- a. Paul first addresses the objection, “*How in the world* is this resurrection of dead bodies going to happen?”
 - i. This is a good question. Think about it the next time you are at a funeral, whether at a funeral parlor or in a church. Think about it when you are at the graveside, as the casket with the dead body (or the urn of cremated ashes) is being lowered into the earth.
 - ii. Can you imagine the remains of the dead person actually coming back to life? What would that look like? How could that take place?
- b. Read **1 Corinthians 15:35-41**.
 - i. In starting to explain how this could happen, Paul first points to the example in nature of a seed of grain being planted in the earth.
 1. It “dies” first, being sown in the ground, and then rises up to a new life.
 2. Each seed produces its own specific grain, according to its own kind. God gives each dead seed, in effect, its own “body”.
 - a. Likewise, each animal in nature has its own specific flesh. Birds, fish and humans all have different kinds of flesh.
 - b. Likewise, in the heavens the sun, moon and stars all differ in glory. Each one is distinctive; they are not all the same.
- c. Read **1 Corinthians 15:42-49**.
 - i. Our bodies are sown “natural” but raised “spiritual”.
 - ii. They are sown “corruptible” but raised “incorruptible” (no longer subject to decay). Therefore, they will be changed, transformed.
 - iii. Jesus is the *second Adam*, re-creating the human race through Himself.
 1. As we bore the likeness of the first man (Adam, who came from dust of the earth), we will bear the likeness of the Man from heaven, Jesus.

2. We can look to the example of Jesus' body after His resurrection, in order to get a better idea of what we should expect.
 - a. His former, dead body was restored and transformed (as in **Ezekiel 37**).
 - b. "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." (**Luke 24:39**, NKJV)
 - i. If we are to be like Him, we also will have "flesh and bones", and not be disembodied spirits.

V. Insights from Early Christian Writers Regarding the Resurrection of the Dead

- a. The following quotes from early Christian writers, provide insight into how they understood the resurrection of the dead. The quotes below are taken from *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot, entry on 'Resurrection of the Dead', pp. 559-564.
- b. From Justin Martyr, writing c. 160 AD:
 - i. "Even if anyone is laboring under a defect of body, yet if he is an observer of the doctrines delivered by Christ, He will raise him up at His second advent perfectly sound. He will make him immortal, incorruptible, and free from grief."
 1. (Original Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 69; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 233)
 2. This statement by Justin reminds me of what the persecuted son in **2 Maccabees 7** said, believing that if hands and tongue were cut off, they would be restored to him upon his resurrection from the dead.
- c. From Tatian, writing c. 160 AD:
 - i. "Having been born, I will exist again. Death will exist no longer, and it will be seen no longer. Similarly, there was a time that I did not exist; yet, afterwards I was born. So even though fire may destroy all traces of my flesh, the earth still receives the vaporized matter. And though [my body] may be dispersed through rivers and seas, or torn in pieces by wild beasts, I am laid up in the storehouses of a wealthy Lord."
 1. (Original Source: Tatian, *Address to the Greeks*, chapter 6; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, p. 67)

2. Here Tatian explains that regardless of what happens to our dead bodies (for example, being burned to ashes and vapor, or torn to pieces and devoured by wild animals or lost at sea), the Lord has the ability to store up our dispersed remains, and to reconstruct them.
- d. From Athenagoras, writing c. 175 AD:
 - i. “That same power can reunite what is dissolved. It can raise up what is prostrate, and restore the dead to life again. It can put the corruptible into a state of incorruption. And the same Being, and the same power and skill, can separate that which has been broken up and distributed among a multitude of animals.... He can separate this, I say, and unite it again with the proper members and parts of members. And this is whether it has passed into one animal, or into many, or even if it has passed again from one animal into others.”
 1. (Original Source: Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection of the Dead*, chapter 3; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, p. 150)
 2. Even if an animal eats someone, and that animal, in turn, is eaten by another animal, the Lord can recreate us from our scattered remains.

VI. Takeaways from This Lesson

- a. Faith in the resurrection of the body can help us if we are ever called to face severe persecution.
- b. Faith that God can and will raise the bodies of the dead bodies back to life, regardless of their decayed and dispersed condition, is a powerful reminder that God, who created the physical universe from nothing, can do *anything*. Absolutely nothing is impossible for God!