

WHERE WE ARE HEADED

For many people—even Christians—thoughts of heaven, eternity, and “resurrection bodies” seems to be more fantasy and illusion than reality we look forward to. The un-known-ness of what lies ahead and the fuzzy thinking that seems to characterize most discussion about “life after death” leaves us with a sense that whatever lies beyond is, somehow, “less real” than this real life we are living. And that kind of misguided thinking is the very thing that Paul is addressing as he finishes articulating his thoughts about the resurrection.

WALKING THROUGH THE DISCUSSION

Where will the opening question take your group? Who knows! There tends to be a great number of permutations about how one thinks of heaven, the “life after,” and our future, bodily resurrection. Don’t worry about getting a particular view nailed down in this opener, just get some of the options out on the table and let people think out loud and freely about what is in their heads and hearts when it comes to things related to the resurrection to come and life after death.

When you turn to Paul’s discussion, it will be clear that there is so much more in this text than you will be able to unpack in one discussion. So, set your sights on getting some of the “big ideas” into the minds and hearts of those in your group.

Paul begins with some analogies, some metaphors. Apparently, some in Corinth had doubts about any future resurrection because they couldn’t conceive of what such a resurrection would be like. (They were acting as if their inability to conceive of something means it couldn’t be true!) So, Paul offers them some “seed thoughts” (no pun intended!) to help them understand resurrection life.

He refers to the “fool” (15:36). Don’t read that as a great insult—he is just using language to refer to someone who discounts God’s part in all of this. (Acting like someone who says there is no God . . . clearly is “foolish!”) The analogy is to something common: seeds. A seed is sown; it is a “bare kernel” (15:37). And that seed, in some sense, “dies.” And what follows is a crop. And it is in this analogy that Paul provides helpful insight into resurrection life.

He wants them to understand that as the seed goes through the transition of “dying” and being put in the ground, there is a continuity between the seed and the crop. You don’t plant a wheat seed and get corn. The seed planted has a real “connectivity” to what ultimately is produced. And although there is a change in *form*, there is a substantial continuity in *identity*. There is a way into thinking well about resurrection life.

Then he turns to varieties of bodies. Paul calls their attention to what they already know: different things have different “bodies” (both animals and non-living things like stars and planets). There are “bodies” (in the sense of heavenly “objects”) that differ in their respective glory. That is, all these heavenly objects do not shine with the same light, they do not illumine the world in the same way. Even

the individual stars differ, one from another. And yet, God made each one just as He intended. And this will be true for “resurrection bodies” as well.

Every living thing has been given, by God, an appropriate body for the expression of its God-given life; and every heavenly object has been given, by God, an appropriate form for the expression of its God-given design. This opens the way for Paul’s thought that in the resurrection, those raised will be given, by God, an appropriate body for the expression of the God-given life we will enjoy in the resurrection.

The challenge raised by the questioner in 15:35 had to do with the difficulty of imagining the kind of resurrection body the dead will have when they are raised. The answer Paul offers is that the creative and creator God has no problem in providing suitable “bodies” for expressing the life He gives to all.

Paul contrasts “before the resurrection life” with “resurrection life”:

The life now is “perishable,” meaning subject to decay and undergoing corruption. The new life will not be subject to decay or corruption.

The life now is marked by “dishonor,” referring to what is without rights, without “standing.” The resurrection life will be “glorious,” something that is fitting for the glory of that new life.

The life now is one of “weakness,” not merely referring to physical weakness but the inherent inability to fully live all that God intends. The resurrection life will be marked by “power.”

The life now is one that is “natural” and the resurrection life will be characterized by being “spiritual.” The contrast here is *not* between that which is “material” and that which is “immaterial.” Paul’s idea of “spiritual” is not, fundamentally, about something consisting of some amorphous, non-physical immateriality; “spiritual” for Paul refers to that which is consistent with and appropriate for life “in the Spirit” (of God).

In talking about the “first Adam” and the “last Adam,” Paul underscores the reality that we share in a likeness to the “Adam” we are united to. We all bear a likeness to the first Adam, sharing in his humanity and physical life. But by faith, those who believe in Christ, are united to that last Adam. And those who are His will bear a likeness to this last Adam, sharing in His “raised humanity” and resurrection life. When Jesus was raised, He was not raised “a spiritual being”—without real bodily existence. He was raised in a physical, human-kind of body. And that is what is in store for those who find their lives in Him. And that future glorified and resurrected body is the appropriate and fitting “you,” designed to live forever with God.

One side note, when Paul says that “flesh and blood” cannot inherit the kingdom, he does not mean that we will be *less than* fully human in the resurrection—don’t lose sight of Jesus’ resurrection body. What he means is that our current condition is not fit for the future life—transformation will be required. But that transformation will not result in us being something less than what we are now, but something more!



INITIAL THOUGHTS

Everyone knows—death looms ahead. Over that there is little debate. What comes next, however, is open to discussion. So, talk about it. What do you think comes “after”? What will life be like beyond the grave?

*We will be
looking at 1
Corinthians
15:35-58*

REFLECTING ON THE TEXT

Paul has been talking to the Corinthians about the resurrection—both Jesus’ and their own future resurrection. How they think about such things really does matter! So Paul wants to address their “fuzzy thinking” about the future resurrection.

What analogies and illustrations does Paul use to help us think well about the resurrection?

How do these word pictures help you understand what resurrection life will be like?

What contrasts does Paul highlight between life before the resurrection and life after the resurrection?

Which of those contrasts carry the most weight for you? Why?

What does Paul say about the timing of this resurrection?
What bearing does that have on how you think about the resurrection?

BUILDING BRIDGES INTO LIFE

What things that make you what you are would you want to have carried over into life beyond the grave? Why?

What things that are part of what makes you what you are would you long to have carried over into life beyond the grave *as long as they were, in some good way, transformed*? What kind of transformation would be needed?

What impact does it have on how you think about your life, today, when you realize that your very human kind of existence now has real continuity and, in that sense, permanence? Does it matter that there really is a “seamlessness” between life now and life in eternity?



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