

## **Further Reading and reflection on 1 Corinthians 15**

### **Death and the Resurrected Body**

#### **Background:**

- In Chapter 15 Paul addresses an issue of significant importance to the ongoing witness of the believers in Corinth; their trust or otherwise in the resurrection of the dead. The immediate cultural context is the dominance of the Greco-Roman philosophy that rejected 'material body' in after life. Evidence of the time would indicate that most Greeks would hold the view that at death, the 'soul' (the word 'psychikon' is what Paul uses in verse 44 which NIV translates 'natural') is released and the 'good' soul would fly/gravitate back to the realm of the gods. In Greek philosophy, there are two parts to human beings; one made of matter (body) and one of eternal or divine origin.
- God's redemptive plan requires a resurrected body. As Paul emphasizes, through out this section, the Christian message contains the expectation that God, in a recreating activity, will raise those who are in Christ, from the dead and will give a resurrection body to those still living, when Christ returns. There is no place for a 'disembodied soul' in the gospel message. In both the work of Christ on the Cross and his resurrection, sin is dealt with and the power of death as a consequence of sin is forever defeated. Death no longer has a hold over creation, for the resurrection has brought about the redemption of Creation and therefore the restoration of humanity into the everlasting community forever in the presence of God.

#### **The general flow of his argument is:**

1. Vs 1-11            The resurrection is central to the Gospel
2. Vs 12-34        The Resurrection functions as a 'first-fruits' for all believers
3. Vs 35-58        Paul compares the present body with the resurrected body

#### **Discussion questions:**

1. The resurrection is central to the Gospel
  - a. Read vs 3-8 and then discuss together what is being said about the resurrection.
    - i. Why do you think that the resurrection is so central in God's redemptive plan?
    - ii. What is so significant about the mention of those who have witnessed the resurrection of Jesus? (In particular consider the impact of what he writes in verse 6)
2. The Resurrection functions as a 'first-fruits' for all believers
  - a. The resurrection of Jesus is not simply a historical fact related to the life of Jesus; it is also a key part of the Christian faith that has significant implications for how disciples of Jesus live in this world as citizens of the kingdom of God.
    - i. Re-read verses 20-24 and consider the significance of what is said about;
      1. Christ the 'firstfruits' – vs 20&23.
      2. What is the significance of the direct connection between Christ and the believers, that we see in the

- phrase 'Christ the firstfruits; then ... those who belong to him?
3. Considering the phrase 'in turn' (or in order) given it is a military term used of an ordered group of soldiers.
  4. The term 'then the end will come' (vs 24) is a conclusive term more like "That's the time of the end".
- ii. As you look at verses 29-32 discuss together what is being highlighted in these verses; and as you do this keep in mind
1. Given the rare Greek term that Paul uses, it is best to translate "what will those do who were baptised for the sake of" in that it appears that some were baptised because of a promise made to a dying loved one so they could meet again at the resurrection. Paul makes no justification of the actual practice, simply states that the actual practice of meeting with people after they die demands belief in the resurrection.
  2. Paul reminds the Corinthians that he has faced significant risks for the sake of the gospel but if there is no resurrection why would he go through so much heartache.
3. Paul compares the present body with the resurrected body
- a. **35-38 – The principle of continuity & transformation**
    - i. Verse 37 – Image of Sowing a seed, and it transforms into a plant. Verse 38 ... But God ... What is being developed here?
  - b. **39-41 – Different types of physicality** "Not all flesh is the same". What is being developed here?
  - c. **42-58 – Distinction between two types of 'humanness'**
    - i. Write out what the present body looks like?
    - ii. Write out what the future resurrected body will look like?
    - iii. Literally, the Greek of vs 44-45 says "It is sown a soulish body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a soulish body and there is a spiritual body. So it is written: the first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a vivifying, life giving spirit." Discuss together the significance of seeing that the difference between these two 'bodies' is that which animates them; for one what animates it is the common life of all human kind while the resurrected body is animated by the indwelling, life consuming and transforming work of the Creator Spirit.
    - iv. Consider the reference to 'heaven' in this passage. Specifically, the reference to the 'heavenly man' is a reference to the one who is 'from heaven'. This is clearly the resurrected Jesus Christ, the ascended King. Cross reference this with Philippians 3:20-21. Vs 49 tells us that when the last day comes, we (those who are in Christ) shall bear the image of the heavenly man; we like Jesus will be resurrected!
    - v. Vs 50 tells us that 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God' – this however is a Jewish idiom that refers to the corruptible perishable human body, or to use Pauls language, 'the soulish body'. Certainly, as Paul has said, this present

body cannot inherit eternal life in the Kingdom, but the resurrected, spirit driven body can. Reflecting on this, and the 4 verses that follow, what implications can you draw out or see from what Paul writes – DISCUSS TOGETHER.

- vi. Reflect a little more on the use of the term 'heavenly' and therefore 'heaven'.
  1. Within the wider Biblical scriptures 'heaven' refers to the place or realm of God and at times is a direct reference to God (the prodigal son saying "I have sinned against heaven..." Luke 15)
  2. It is also used in relationship to God's reign or rule as in "The Kingdom of Heaven" – which is not a geographical place but the rule or authority of a sovereign God.
  3. It also has an eschatological connection – as in the end time when the new heavens and a new earth and from where the resurrected Christ will come from on the judgement day.
  4. Given the above, read the following passages in Paul's letters which speak of 'heaven' and summarise what Paul is saying:
    - a. 2 Corinthians 5:1-2 – We need to read the passage in the context of 4:16-5:10 as this is the whole passage that Paul addresses. Note in particular
      - i. The strong link between the present body (this is what is meant by 'earthly tent') and the future 'building' which is a reference to the resurrected body
      - ii. Vs 2 demonstrates that it is the resurrected body that is being spoken of, as this 'habitation' is from heaven – NOT in heaven. This is consistent with Paul's words in Phil 3:20-21.
    - b. Philippians 3:20-21 – Note that the believer belongs to the realm of heaven and the resurrected Jesus will come from heaven and he will transform our present bodies to be like his glorious (resurrected body). There is no inference at all of us going "to heaven" – rather Jesus leaves heaven to join with us.
    - c. Col 1:5 – Note that the only reference here is that there is our hope in Christ, which is stored up for us in heaven. This hope, given the context is most likely a reference to the eternal hope of the resurrection that we have in Christ who is 'in heaven'. There is nothing in the text that easily directs us to seeing a 'place' of eternal rest in a place called heaven.
  5. What is the place of rest then, for those who have 'fallen asleep' in Christ? The only reasonable

conclusion that can be drawn from harmonising the relevant biblical texts is to conclude that there is a place of rest and then after the day of the Lord, there is the resurrection of these ones first, with new resurrection bodies, and those who are still alive (see 1 Cor 15)

- a. What about the thief on the cross and Jesus words – This day you will be with me in paradise. The word paradise in Luke 23:43 has mixed meaning. It can mean a pleasant garden and in Rev 2:7 it refers to the tree of life in the garden on the last day. Jesus seems to be assuring the thief that when he dies a physical death that very day, he will pass into this special place of rest, and be 'with me'.
- b. The words of assurance that Jesus gave his disciples in the discourse of John 14 appear at their most simplest level, to communicate that although Jesus is about to leave them, they can be assured that he will return and gather them to himself that they might be with him. It is interesting to note that Jesus says he goes to prepare a place and then he will return. The preparation might easily be seen as his death and resurrection and the subsequent work of the church of believers in preparation for the last day when the resurrected Jesus Christ will appear and take those to 'be with him' as resurrected being themselves, in the place where God will be, which according to John's revelation in the final book of the New Testament, is the new heavens and new earth.
- c. If we were to harmonise the above two narratives involving Jesus with the limited passages above about heaven and the protracted discussions by Paul on the Resurrection body, we might conclude that Jesus reassures the believer that, once death occurs, they move into paradise, which is in the presence of Jesus in the realm of God's reign, sometimes referred to as 'heaven' other times 'paradise' in a state of restful bliss until the day of the resurrection, when first, those who have fallen asleep will be raised in the transformed body, and then those still alive will also be 'changed' and all will be with Jesus, in the presence of God, in the new heaven and new earth.

4. Paul rounds off the discussion with exhortation to give them themselves fully to the work of the Lord while they have breath to do so.
  - a. What might this mean for you as you live as a disciple of Jesus Christ?
  - b. What implications does the above reflections, move you into – how now shall you live your life?