

# 1 Corinthians 15b – Chapter Study

## INTRO

Let's summarize ch. 15 so far . . .

### III. MAIN BODY 1:18-16:18

#### G. The Gospel Ch. 15

##### 1. The Gospel vs. 1-8

A thumbnail sketch of the Good News of Jesus' death & resurrection.

##### 2. Paul's testimony vs. 9-11

Paul didn't make the Gospel up – he received it and faithfully passed it on to the Corinthians.

##### 3. The resurrection vs. 12-58

###### a. our hope vs. 12-19

The resurrection *proves* the death of Christ fully paid for our sins and that there is *new life* for those who put their trust in Jesus.

###### b. sure vs. 20-28

The resurrection *really happened* – it isn't just an allegory.

Paul writes all of this about the resurrection because it was under attack in Corinth.

As we saw last week, the resurrection was something people had a hard time accepting.

It was a miracle that defied & undercut a central belief of Greek philosophy & science.

So many people had a hard time believing it.

Because of that, in a desire to make the Gospel *more appealing*, some in the church had redefined the resurrection – saying it *wasn't a literal event* but was merely a *metaphor* for the *spiritual* change that takes place when someone trusts Christ.

Paul wrote to correct this downgrading of the resurrection and affirm that Jesus' BODY rose from the dead.

Furthermore, our resurrection is like His for He is the firstfruits!

###### c. think! vs. 29-34

Paul *rebukes* those who would turn the resurrection into a mere metaphor.

If the resurrection isn't literal & real, then there IS NO Gospel!

Because Jesus would still be dead and we'd have no assurance of anything.

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Now Paul turns to the "**How**" of the resurrection.

Since the stumbling block was over the Greek idea that matter is evil while spirit is good – how does the resurrection take place?

*What's raised* in the resurrection?

What we're about to read can be confusing unless we keep the issue Paul was dealing with in the forefront.

So let me recap that that was.

In Greek philosophy & science, physical matter was unalterably corrupt & evil, while that which was spiritual was holy & good.

The resurrection says that matter, the body, is changed into something spiritual.

To most people, that sounded like evil was made good, and they just didn't see how that was possible.

So Paul writes this to show that the Gospel is about a radical transformation that God alone can accomplish.

But God has placed *examples* of this transformation in nature so we can get a glimpse into it's reality.

**d. how vs. 35-49**

**<sup>35</sup> But someone will say, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?"**

These were the questions those who denied a literal resurrection were posing.

And they weren't asking for an answer. They thought the question itself proved a literal resurrection was impossible.

Because a corrupt physical body that's died – CAN'T be raised into something holy & good.

This question was asked by the skeptics rhetorically & with scorn.

So Paul responds in kind . . .

**<sup>36</sup> Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies.**

Paul answers the skeptics' challenge by turning to nature for some illustrations.

He begins with the process a seed goes through when it becomes a mature plant.

**<sup>37</sup> And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other grain. <sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body.**

If you have a seed in your hand. You know nothing about what the full-grown plant it has the potential to produce looks like – but all that life is there in the potentiality of that seed.

In order for that mature plant to come forth, the seed itself must "die."

It's buried in the soil, then is transformed into something else.

The resurrection follows a similar course.

These physical bodies are like seeds of the potential life God originally created people to possess.

When we die in faith in Christ, then God brings forth out of our bodies the people He originally created us to be.

**<sup>39</sup> 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.**

God gave each creature the body shape & kind of material form it needed to best fill its ecological niche.

It's based on these forms that we classify creatures into Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species.

The Bible has one category – Kinds.

The point Paul makes is that just as different animals have different forms appropriate to their God-ordained place in nature, so there is a proper spiritual form for those who've passed over into the spiritual realm.

**<sup>40</sup> There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. <sup>41</sup> 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. <sup>42</sup> So also is the resurrection of the dead.**

Last year in the Sierra's we spent one night just sitting out watching the night sky.

The more you look the more clear it becomes that the stars are different.

Some are bigger & brighter.

You can see what seem to be subtle variations in color.

Paul says if you lift your sight from considering the different creature shapes & forms of the earth to the different celestial shapes, you realize creation is a canvas of uniqueness.

The resurrection will not annihilate or erase this uniqueness.

*Our* resurrection will not merge us into some kind of uniform cosmic consciousness.

A famous pantheist of last century was asked if he feared death.

He said that he didn't really care one way or the other because "like a drop falling into the ocean he would unite with the universal mind."

The Bible knows no such metaphysical nonsense!

In the resurrection, we will still be *unique individuals*.

**<sup>42</sup> So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. <sup>43</sup> It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. <sup>44</sup> It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.**

The idea of resurrection was totally undesirable to the Corinthians because they thought of it as a *resuscitation*.

They thought *this* body would be patched up & re-animated.

Since they loathed the flesh as a corrupt & evil necessity the thought of being eternally linked to it was ghastly.

We ought to say a hardy "Amen" with the Greeks *if* resurrection is merely a re-animation of this body But Paul makes clear here resurrection is **NOT** re-animation; it's *transformation!*

Like the metamorphosis a caterpillar goes through in becoming a butterfly.

The caterpillar's body is fine for the life it lives; crawling around on its belly thru the muck & mire of this world, munching on soggy leaves.

But when it's time to fly, it goes through a change in form.

It enters the coffin of it's cocoon, dies to its old way of living & emerges in a different form;

One fit to sail through the skies as it feasts on the sweet nectar of flowers.

So it is for us. Now we live in these bodies.

But one day we too will enter a coffin. The body will rest.

When Jesus Christ comes again, that body will be transformed into something new, yet *retaining* its unique identity.

**<sup>45</sup> And so it is written, [Gen. 2:7] "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.**

We get physical life from the first Adam.

Spiritual life comes for Christ –called here the "*last Adam*" because there are only 2 men in all of history who were born free – Adam & Jesus.

**<sup>46</sup> However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual.**

This parallels what Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3 about being born again.

First birth brings physical life.

The second or new birth brings spiritual life.

**<sup>47</sup> The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven.**

**<sup>48</sup> 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. <sup>49</sup> And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.**

Just as all of us bear the image of Adam by virtue of our *physical* descend from him, faith in Christ links us to *Him* & the image Man was originally created to bear – the untarnished image of God.

Paul's emphasis in all this is that the resurrection means a fundamental transformation of the physical into the spiritual.

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Now he turns to the *ultimate victory* over sin & death the resurrection brings.

**e. ultimate victory vs. 50-58**

**<sup>50</sup> Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.**

If the Corinthians were concerned about tainting the spiritual realm with evil, they needn't worry about it.  
Again, the resurrection is not resuscitation, it's transformation.

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Many people think all they have to do to get in to heaven is be a good person.

But as it says here, flesh & blood *cannot* inherit the kingdom of heaven.

It's like this; You get an invitation to a party.

On the invitation it says that *formal attire is required*.

But you never take the time to rent a tux or buy a formal dress.

The day of the party comes & you show up at the door in your shorts & t-shirt. The doorman won't admit you because you aren't dressed properly.

You argue with him but he always responds with the same words; "was on the invitation, 'Formal attire required.'"

Life in heaven requires a different attire than the one we wear in this world.

And the only way to get the proper attire is to believe in Jesus Christ

**<sup>51</sup> Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, [die] but we shall all be changed— <sup>52</sup> 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. <sup>53</sup> For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.**

Because mortal flesh is not a proper vehicle to experience existence in heaven.

If you want to enjoy the beauties of the Great Barrier Reef off the coast of Australia, you'll need special gear.

You'll need a wetsuit, buoyancy compensator, scuba tank, regulator, mask, & fins.

Your land suit has to be augmented with these accoutrements if you want to *spend time underwater*.

In an even more basic way, if we want to *spend eternity in heaven*, we have to trade in these earth-suits for bodies *proper* for there.

Paul says here that the believer's transformation from earthly to heavenly will occur in an *instant*, in the most infinitesimal portion of time.

This refers to the rapture of the church.

When Jesus comes, those who've died in Christ will rise & those who are alive will be caught up to meet them.

Then we will all ascend together to be with the Lord.

Paul calls this a mystery because no one but God knows when the rapture will occur.

It will occur suddenly, without warning. And it will be in less than the blink of an eye.

When the Rapture occurs it will catch the world completely by surprise and after it's occurred it will continue to baffle the lost as to what's happened.

**<sup>54</sup> 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: [Isaiah 25:8] "Death is swallowed up in victory."**

Paul is so inspired by this thought of death's defeat, he pens some poetry -

**<sup>55</sup> "O Death, where is your sting?**

**O Hades, where is your victory?"**

**<sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Paul comes full circle back to the Good News that Jesus has conquered sin & death & the resurrection proves it!

The implications of that are nothing less than staggering so he breaks out in mighty peals of praise.

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Look at v. 56 again –

**The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law.**

When a boy, I had a terrible allergy to bee stings.

During the Summer I went barefoot all the time & because we had clover in the front yard, it was inevitable that I'd get a sting.

One Summer I got a one between my toes & my foot swelled up like a balloon.

I ran to my mom in the house. She got out the tweezers & extracted the stinger.

I cried fiercely because a swollen foot meant I'd not get to participate with my friends in all the Summer fun.

I was so angry at that stupid bee!

Mom told me the bee that stung me, *died* afterward.

At the cross, Jesus took the stinger of sin on Himself, *all* of it.

By doing so, He disarmed it, ending it's domination of the human race.

All that the law requires, Jesus fulfilled.

Those who trust in Christ have His work attributed to them.

Because we fulfill the law IN CHRIST, God no longer deals with us on the basis of sin.

And because of *that*, death has no claim on us.

**<sup>58</sup> Therefore, my beloved brethren,**

***Because*** sin & death have been defeated by the resurrection . . .

**be steadfast, immovable,**

Don't let some crazy false teaching about the resurrection, some wind of doctrine, blow you off your hope in Christ.

**always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.**

These are just the words of a coach sending his battered & beleaguered team back out on the field for the 2<sup>nd</sup> half.

Paul isn't giving them a pep rally. He lived this!

Because Jesus is the Victorious Lord, the *best* thing to do is to *go for it* in living for God, and seek to be used for His glory.

Because the grave is empty, our faith isn't.