

## § 7. Doctrine of Christ

### Lecture 27

#### Paul's Teaching on the Nature of the Resurrection Body

Today we want to continue our study of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 15. You remember last time we saw how Paul offers a very simple logical argument to refute the Corinthian heresy that the dead are not raised. Paul reasons in verses 12 and 13 *if the dead are not raised then Christ has not been raised*. But then premise 2 (verse 20) *but in fact Christ has been raised from the dead*. From which it follows logically that therefore the dead are raised.

Today we come to the second half of the chapter – the nature of the resurrection body which is verses 35 through 57. In these verses Paul provides his solution to the Corinthian heresy. He shows why the Corinthians are wrong in thinking that there is no resurrection of the dead. Let's read together what Paul has to say in 1 Corinthians 15:35-57.

But some one will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is alike, but there is one kind for men, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are celestial bodies and there are 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, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Lo! 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 imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this

perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

“O death, where is thy victory?

O death, where is thy sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

You can almost hear the strains of Handel's “Messiah” as you read those verses, can't you?<sup>1</sup> Here the Corinthian objection is found in verse 35: How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come? The Corinthian Christians were in some way revolted at the idea of the resurrection of this material body with all of its infirmities and drawbacks and deficits, and so they apparently denied the resurrection of the dead. Paul's answer in this half of the chapter is to emphasize that the resurrection body that we shall have is not simply a resuscitation of this earthly body that we presently have but will involve a radical transformation of the body so that the resurrection body will be endowed with supernatural properties and powers far beyond what this earthly body enjoys. Therefore the Corinthians should not object to this sort of doctrine of the resurrection when it's properly understood.

In order to convey to these Corinthian Christians the radical difference between our earthly body and the resurrection body that we shall have Paul appeals to three analogies in verses 35 to 41. The first analogy is the analogy between the seed and the plant. The seed that is sown is obviously much, much different than the plant that eventually comes from it. Think of the difference between the seed of a date and the palm tree that would grow out of that seed. Obviously Paul and Israelites were familiar with different kinds of seeds, as he says. They knew the difference between corn and wheat or a date palm and an olive pit. There are different sorts of plants that come forth from these seeds. This is an apt analogy to the resurrection in the sense that this earthly body is like the seed that is sown in the ground. Later Paul will pick up this language of being sown to describe the burial of the earthly body like a seed. And then the resurrection body is like that vastly, vastly different plant that springs forth from the seed that was sown. So this is a good analogy in this sort of temporal transformation that will take place.

The second analogy that he appeals to is to different kinds of flesh. He says that even in the animal kingdom there are different sorts of flesh that animals have, birds have, fish have, human beings have. I think the word “flesh” here basically means “meat.” These different kinds of organic creatures have different kinds of meat. There's a difference

---

<sup>1</sup> 5:22

between pork and beef and tilapia, for example. So Paul is saying even in the earthly realm we see that there are great differences between things. Therefore we shouldn't be surprised if there are great differences between our present earthly body and the resurrection body that we will someday have.

Then the third analogy is particularly apt, and this is the difference between the glory of celestial bodies of different sorts and terrestrial things that exist. Here the word “glory” undoubtedly refers to their luminosity because he speaks of one glory of the sun, another of the moon, another of the stars, and star differs from star in glory – they have different brightness that even these ancient Israelites could see as they looked up at the night sky with the naked eye. In the same way Paul says that the resurrection body will differ radically from the earthly body in its glory. It will be much, much more glorious than the present earthly body that we have. So we see a preview of this, as it were, or an analogy, an illustration in the different luminosities of celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies in the world today.<sup>2</sup>

By means of these three analogies – the seed and the plant, the different kinds of meat, the difference in luminosity between celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies – Paul is trying to help the Corinthians to see that there can be tremendous and important differences between different things and particularly between this earthly body that we have and the resurrection body that we will have. He will discuss those with verse 42 and following.

In verse 42 he says, “so it is with the resurrection of the dead.” And he applies these analogies to the resurrection of the dead in order to contrast our present earthly body with the resurrection body that we shall have. Paul draws basically four contrasts between our present earthly body and our future resurrection body.

The first is that the earthly body is mortal whereas the resurrection body will be immortal. Our earthly bodies are perishable. They age. They wear out. Finally, we die. It is the inevitable outcome of our humanity that we are going to die unless we live until the return of Christ. The earthly body is a perishable and mortal body. By contrast, the resurrection body will be immortal. It will be imperishable. It will never die. It will never decay. It will never corrupt. This is an enormous difference between these earthly bodies and the resurrection body that we will someday have.

The second contrast that he draws between the earthly body and the resurrection body is that the earthly body is weak whereas the resurrection body will be powerful. We have limited abilities – limited strength and capacity – in these earthly bodies. And they are frail. They're all too susceptible as we know to injury and illness and infirmity. But the resurrection body is going to be an incredibly powerful body. It will not be susceptible to

---

<sup>2</sup> 10:10

accident or injury or decay or infirmity. This is going to be a powerful, immortal, bodily existence that we will someday have.

The third contrast is that the earthly body is dishonorable whereas the resurrection body will be glorious. The reason that the earthly body is dishonorable is not because of its materiality. It's dishonorable because it's infected with sin. And because we are sinful this earthly body is dishonored – it is shameful. It is a fallen sort of existence as a result of human sin. By contrast, the resurrection body will be glorious. Here I don't think that Paul means that it's going to be shining or luminous. That was just an analogy with the celestial bodies and the terrestrial bodies. That's one sense of glory. But the sense in which the resurrection body will be glorious is not that it's going to be shining like a light bulb but it's going to be freed from sin and all of the effects and damages of sin. This is going to be a body which is sinless and unimpaired by evil. It will be freed entirely from the influence and effects of evil and therefore will be glorious just as God is glorious.<sup>3</sup>

None of these contrasts so far would lead you to think that the earthly body is material but the resurrection body is somehow going to be immaterial, whatever that might mean – what would be an immaterial body? But the last contrast has occasioned a great deal of confusion. In the translation that I read you (which was the RSV) it renders this last contrast as saying that the earthly body is physical and the resurrection body is spiritual. The way we use these terms in English might lead you to think that the earthly body is a material, tangible, extended, visible body whereas the resurrection body is going to be an intangible, immaterial, invisible, unextended “body” of some sort. But in fact that's not at all the meaning of Paul's terms here, and commentators on 1 Corinthians are agreed on this point. The word that is translated in the RSV as “physical” is *psychikos*. You notice the word in there – *psyche* – which means “soul.” We get our word “psychic” from that. *Psyche* is a “soul.” So this word literally mean “soul-ish.” The earthly body is soul-ish. Obviously, in saying that the earthly body is soul-ish, Paul didn't mean that the earthly body is made out of soul. Rather, soul-ish (or *psychikos*) is a word that is used in the New Testament to denote the fallen natural human nature. Probably many of your translations render this more accurately as “the earthly body is natural” - that is to say, it pertains to and partakes in fallen human nature. *Psychikos* always has that sort of negative connotation.

Here is another one. What is the word for spiritual? Well, it is *pneumatikos*. You notice the word *pneuma* in that adjective. *Pneuma*, as we all know, is a word from which we get words like “pneumatic” (like a pneumatic pump). *Pneuma* is “spirit” or “wind” or “air.” In saying that the resurrection body is *pneumatikos*, Paul no more means that this is going to be a body made out of spirit than when he said that the earthly body (*psychikos*) meant it is a body made out of soul. The body that is *psychikos* (soul-ish) is a body that is

---

<sup>3</sup> 15:00

natural. It pertains to and is dominated by the fallen human nature. Similarly, *pneumatikos* describes not the substance of the resurrection body but its orientation. It is spiritual in the sense that it is under the domain of the Holy Spirit of God. This is the sense of spiritual that you use when you say, for example, that the pastor is a spiritual man. You don't mean that the pastor is an invisible, intangible, immaterial, unextended man. Rather, you mean that he is oriented toward and dominated by the Spirit of God. In that sense, he is spiritual. This is what Paul means in calling the resurrection body a spiritual body in contrast to a soulish natural body.

If there were any doubt about this fact, these doubts would be resolved by turning back a few pages to 1 Corinthians 2:14-15 where we have exactly the same vocabulary applied to people.<sup>4</sup> In 1 Corinthians 2:14-15 he says,

The unspiritual man [*anthropos psychikos* – the natural man] does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man [*anthropos pneumatikos*] judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.

Here the contrast is not between material, visible, tangible man and immaterial, unextended, invisible man. Rather, the natural man is the man who is dominated by the fallen human nature and oriented toward it. The spiritual man is the man who is filled with the Spirit of God and dominated by and oriented toward the Spirit of God. So in 1 Corinthians 2 we have exactly the same terms and their usage and meaning is very clear.

So when it comes to 1 Corinthians 15, the contrast between the earthly body and the resurrection body is not between a material body and an immaterial body, which for Paul would be a contradiction in terms. What in the world would be an immaterial, unextended, invisible, intangible body? It is a contradiction in terms. Paul believed in the resurrection of the body, not the immortality of the soul. All Pauline commentators are agreed with this. Paul's hope was not Plato's hope that the soul would slough off the prison-house of the body and go away to be with God. Rather Paul held to the traditional Jewish belief of the resurrection of the body. So he believes that there will be a resurrection body, but it will transcend the powers and capacities of the earthly body in dramatic ways. It will be immortal, powerful, glorious, and it will be dominated by and oriented toward the Spirit of God and freed completely from sin.

The French commentator Jean Héring says that the contrast between physical and spiritual (which we've inherited since Descartes to mean the sort of contrast between the mind and the body) is so dominate that he says we shouldn't really translate this term *pneumatikos* as “spiritual” because of the misconnotations that that engenders. So Héring suggests that as the opposite of “natural,” it would be better to translate *pneumatikos* as

---

<sup>4</sup> 20:04

supernatural. Now that is not the literal etymology of the word, but I think he's making a good point. This is a contrast between a natural body and a supernatural body that will be dominated by and oriented toward the Spirit of God. If you look in, again, this same letter – chapter 10 of 1 Corinthians – the RSV translators use “supernatural” as a translation of the word *pneumatikos* in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4:

I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same supernatural food [*pneumatikos*] and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ.

Obviously the manna and the water that the Israelites ate and drank in the Sinai desert was not immaterial, intangible, invisible, unextended bread and water. That would hardly have sustained them for 40 years in the wilderness. Right? Rather, these were physical realities that they ate and drank, but they were supernatural in some sense – provided by God, miraculous if you will. I think that Héring is right that it would be less misleading to translate this last contrast as between the natural body and the supernatural resurrection body.<sup>5</sup>

## **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* Couldn't you also interpret it as “living spirit” whereas natural man is a cut off dead spirit. It would be raised the living spirit.

*Dr. Craig:* Certainly it would be living because the Spirit gives life.

*Student:* After we trusted in him, we are already a part of that. It is just less of a degree. It is going to be more of that at a later of time.

*Dr. Craig:* Yes, Paul says we have this treasure in earthen vessels. He says that even though our mortal, earthly body is wasting away and dying, he says inwardly we are being renewed everyday by the Holy Spirit. So there is life at work within us through the Holy Spirit. Someday that transformation will be complete by the body also being born anew, as it were, and being invested with imperishability, immortality, sinlessness, and so forth.

*Student:* [off-mic; asks how to spell *pneumatikos*]

*Dr. Craig:* *Pneumatikos* – the first part is like the word “pneuma” in English.

*Student:* Could you do an analogy whereby because of the fall the human race was sort of contaminated with like a cancer in the sense that even though we may have the Holy Spirit, we accept the Holy Spirit, there is a continual deadness and attraction to evil? In

---

<sup>5</sup> 25:00

the resurrection body, instead of having Satan within us, that will be replaced by the Holy Spirit so now we are purged of all of the cancer – the sin that is dwelling in us. In lieu of that will be the Holy Spirit that will allow us to fully embrace God in all his glory.

*Dr. Craig:* Yes, I think that is well said.

*Student:* Thank you for clarification. I think I have a perfect example for this. Early on when Boeing was incorporating computers into their design and drawing system, if you tell an engineer you don't need a drawing anymore and everything will be in computers, they could not understand. But now I can see that the spiritual body is like data in the computer that can manufacture an airplane or their parts but a drawing is obsolete because they no longer need that physical piece of paper.

*Dr. Craig:* I don't think that is right. I think that is the misunderstanding that I am trying to get away from. The contrast between the computer information and the physical, material drawing is not the contrast that I think is drawn here. It is not that the resurrection body is no longer a material, physical object like the computer data is no longer on a physical hard copy. I think that is not a good analogy. I think that it is a change of orientation – more like what someone earlier was describing. That is evident, again, in 1 Corinthians 2 where the difference between the two types of people – the spiritual person and the natural person – is not between materiality and immateriality.

*Student:* The goal of data or the drawing is the production of the airplane. So whether the update of the drawing can become so messy that they have a hard time figuring out what is the latest update, and yet data is clean. But it is all pointing to the production of the airplane. In that sense I think we can draw the analogy.

*Dr. Craig:* In that case, the analogy between the earthly body and the resurrection body would be between the old crummy airplane and the new airplane that will be produced using the computers and so forth. That would be a good contrast. The one has powers and capacities that the old one didn't. But don't bring in this stuff about the computer data information. That is, I think, drawing a false contrast.<sup>6</sup>

*Student:* Do you think another helpful description would be the difference between the two for what is the primary or dominant animating life force? Is that a good description? To say one is fallen, natural state. The resurrection body would be spiritual.

*Dr. Craig:* That has got to be right. In calling Adam *pyschikos*, it is the human soul which is fallen and corrupt that is its animating principal. Whereas the resurrection body is going to be a body but its animating principal will be the Spirit of God and not this fallen, corrupted human soul. I think that is a good way of putting it.

## **END DISCUSSION**

That leaves us at a good breaking point. We will next want to turn to a discussion of the first Adam and the last Adam and how they differ from each other. I think what we'll do is take that question up next time.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Total Running Time: 31:53 (Copyright © 2017 William Lane Craig)