

## Week 16, 1 Corinthians 15:35–58

### Hook



**Main Point:** Resurrection transforms us to be with God forever.

**Group Activity:** More than 4,000 people have summited Mount Everest, the world's tallest mountain. It stands five and a half miles above sea level and causes quite the barrier for those adventurous enough to attempt to reach its peak. Play this video (<http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/21/health/everest-medical-care/>) for your class and engage them in the following discussion questions:

*Describe the challenges that the human body would face climbing Mount Everest. (Teacher note: write the challenges on the board.) What equipment would be necessary to assist someone in overcoming these shortfalls? (Teacher note: write the equipment next to the problem that it solves.)*

*What other treacherous environments has modern technology made accessible for humans?*

*Describe a time in your life when achieving a goal required significant physical training. Did you achieve your goal?*

**Transition:** Today's lesson will examine the believers' Resurrection bodies and the amazing transformation that is necessary for the age to come.

## **Week 16, 1 Corinthians 15:35–58**

### **Book**

**Main Point: Resurrection transforms us to be with God forever.**

**Text Summary:** Now that Paul has explained to those in Corinth that Resurrection is central to the message of the Gospel, he shows them why. Paul uses the last portion of his letter to explain to these believers the nature of the Resurrection and what Christ does to humanity in its natural state, transforming believers into their eternal state. Paul shows the continuity between our natural bodies and our spiritual bodies, showing also the change that Christ must bring to make us fit for God's eternal kingdom.

### **1 Corinthians 15:35–49 [Read]**

**Sub-Point: Through the Resurrection, Christ shows our bodies are valuable.**

After addressing the reality of the Resurrection and the theological importance of it, Paul now turns to questions regarding the nature of the Resurrection and how our physical bodies will be different. Those whom Paul is answering want to know the relationship between the two bodily states, pre- and post-Resurrection.

Paul's main argument in verses 35–49 is to show that there is very important difference between the nature of our bodies before the Resurrection and after. He uses several illustrations to do so. One of his most helpful analogies is the seed and the plant. Paul explains that the seed and the plant that comes from it have the same chemical makeup; they have the same DNA, but look very different. There's no way to look at a seed and deduce merely from looking at the seed what the future plant will look like. There's transformation, but there's also continuity. This is a big aspect of Paul's argument.

This is the same with the Resurrection. Our bodies now are the seeds. Our bodies must go into the ground before God brings forth the splendor and glory that will be our resurrected bodies. Paul makes sure to say in his defense in verse 38 that God knows what He is doing and is capable of bringing to existence our resurrected state. Just as He has given different levels of splendor and radiance to entities in His created universe, so, too, has He reserved a radiance and splendor and majesty that will be our resurrected bodies.

The seed that dies and comes to life connects to Paul's earlier mention of Adam and Christ. Humanity dies in Adam, the seed, and is brought to life in Christ, the plant that comes forth in Resurrection.

Paul brings to light all that will be made new when the Resurrection comes. No more decay and internal breakdown. No more shame and dishonor. No more weakness, physical deformity, physical sickness, helplessness. All will be made new and right. When Paul mentions natural and spiritual bodies, he is not describing the difference between the material world and spiritual world. He's not dividing body and spirit. What Paul is doing here is contrasting the governing agent of the body. Where once humanity was subject to the governing laws of physical life, it will one day operate under the full control of the Spirit of Christ. That is Paul's meaning behind natural and spiritual. Taylor writes, "To live in a resurrected body is to experience a new mode of existence, life directed and empowered by the spirit, suitable to the age to come, in a body untainted by sin and death in any sense."<sup>1</sup>

Unlike the cultural view for this period, the body was important in God's redemptive story. The goal isn't to escape the body, the goal is for it to be transformed. Um explains this well when he says, "Christianity affirms the longing to overcome death, disease, sickness, and decay, but it doesn't do so by escaping from the body but by transforming the body itself!"<sup>2</sup> Paul shows that Adam wasn't spiritually in existence before he was created. Genesis shows that he was formed and was given life. Christ, on the other hand, gives life Himself rather than receives it. This shows the nature of how God has designed it. In the Resurrection, we are raised to new life. We no longer bear the image of Adam in his fallen humanity but rather we gain the image of Christ in His resurrected humanity.

***How does the view of Resurrection go against the cultural ideas of Paul's present cultural audience?***

***What does Paul mean when he uses the terms "natural bodies" and "spiritual bodies"?***

***What does Paul note as the difference between Adam and Christ?***

**1 Corinthians 15:50–58 [Read]**

**Sub-Point: In order to be in God's Kingdom, we must be transformed.**

After describing that transformation is necessary, Paul tells these believers why. Humanity is up against an unbeatable foe: the body in its fallen state. Humanity *as is* cannot enter into God's kingdom. Humanity cannot bring the nature of this world into the nature of the coming one. God's nature, His purity and holiness, cannot allow it. The world in its present state is in opposition to how it will be. Imperfection is at odds with perfection. Purity is at war with sin.

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, Mark [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 407.

<sup>2</sup> Um, Stephen T. [2015] *Preaching the Word Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 276.

Humanity needs a change, a transformation. And Paul is saying that this transformation, as he has already described, is found in Christ.

God's kingdom can't allow death and decay to enter. Those who are welcomed into God's kingdom must be outfitted and prepared to live within it. This is what the Resurrection does. The Resurrection outfits believers, transforms them, for life in a new world, a world that we are not fit for unless we undergo a change.

This is the mystery that Paul addresses in verse 51–52. Christ will come and inaugurate the change that is required and needed. This mystery is that Christ will bring the necessary change. It is not possible on our own. And God will do this. He will make the change in an instant when Resurrection occurs. Paul informs them that Resurrection is coming. The dead in Christ will be raised first and then those who are still living will be instantly transformed.

Paul wants the Corinthians to see that they can't attain this themselves. This is the victory Paul speaks of when he quotes from Isaiah 25 and Hosea 13 in verses 54–55. God brings victory over the sting of death, the effects of death, through the Cross of Christ and His Resurrection, as he writes in verse 57.

The truth is, no one wants to die. We want to defeat death. We try so hard to outsmart death by changing the way we eat, exercise and live. The truth is, the change we need, the ammunition we need, to defeat death is found in nothing else but Christ. He is the imperishable hope that our natural bodies need. Paul concludes by saying since this is true, since Christ has done what is needed on our behalf, let the reality of this hope affect the way we live, knowing that victory is coming and Christ will bring the transformation that we need.

We can't be in the Lord's presence for eternity the way we are. Something has to happen. Something we can't do. But thanks be to God that He has made a way where there wasn't one. He has done this through the victory of His Son and offered us a place to share in this victory and to claim it for ourselves.

***Why must humanity undergo transformation before entering into God's kingdom?***

***What does Paul say the natural order must do to achieve victory over sin in death (vv. 54–55)?***

***What is central to this transformation and victory taking place? What does Paul argue is the linchpin in our future hope?***



## Week 16, 1 Corinthians 15:35–58

### Took



**Main Point: Resurrection transforms us to be with God forever.**

**Object Lesson:** Provide each person in your class with a seed. Read verses 35 through 37 again and challenge your class to cling to the hope they have in Jesus. Remember that bodies are impacted by the fall of man, susceptible to pain, disease and decay. But just as the seed in their hand has the potential to one-day transform into something new and incredible, so, too, the believer's body will undergo a remarkable change.

**Lesson Conclusion:** Death is coming. There's nothing we can do about it. But Paul wants us to see that there is a way for death not to have the last word: clinging to Christ and allowing His Resurrection to cover us and transform us. This is our ticket to eternity. This is the way into God's coming kingdom. We must be transformed and made new in order to enter into the land without death, decay and destruction. We need our spiritual bodies, bodies fully governed and empowered by the Spirit of Christ. We need to shed our natural selves riddled with sin and mortality. The Resurrection of Christ is our answer. It is our hope to be made new. The mystery is that no matter how hard we try on our own, we can't defeat death and we can't stop it from coming. But through Christ, we can have life beyond the grave.

### Challenge

**Cease striving and trust Christ.** Let the psalmist's words encourage you to be still, to cease striving, and know that God is God. Let the hope of Christ's victory over sin and death bring you joy and allow you to stop trying to work for the transformation only Christ can give. Believe that God has already done the work needed for you. Believe that you can't do it yourself. Let Him do what He can and begin trusting Him for Gospel change, not your own efforts.

**Die to "self" daily.** Pray that God through His Spirit would begin sanctifying you more and more into the image of His Son. Pray that you would be sharpened and fashioned more into the image of Christ and that God would begin to work in you to transform you so that your old self continues to die daily and your new person begins to shine through.

**The future is coming.** Don't let the present reality of this world discourage you. Trust in the fact that your labor, your life, your work, is not in vain. It's not for nothing. Lift your head up and let the Scripture remind you that death has been defeated and that Christ will not lose and He will get the last word. Don't let the cultural temperature of our day convince you that all hope is lost. Christ will come and He will reign. Death can't sting us. Death can't hurt us. Christ has already taken the pain and sting for us so we get to experience future joy.