

GOSPEL of *Grace*
FELLOWSHIP

1 Corinthians

Jesus Christ, Our Lord

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F - L - I - G - H - T

F - The apostle Paul authored the book of 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:1-2). Paul was a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin and a Pharisee who persecuted the early church before he converted to Christianity.

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from the city of Ephesus during his third missionary journey. He ministered in the city for more than two years (Acts 19) and most likely composed the letter around AD 55-56.

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F - L - I - G - H - T

L - Much of what Paul covered in 1 Corinthians regarded Jesus' role as head of the church, the result of what Jesus did on the cross (Matt. 16:18-21). So much of what the Corinthian church was doing defied the headship of Christ, choosing worldly wisdom and ways over godly gratitude and grace. Where Jesus championed unity among his people, they broke off into factions, looking to lift themselves above other believers instead of following Jesus' example and lowering themselves to serve everyone. They were saved but selfish.

The results of operating in their own strength revealed themselves in sexual impurity and lack of doctrinal clarity, particularly about Jesus' resurrection, which is what sets Christianity apart from other religions and Jesus apart from other religious leaders. Paul explored its importance in depth (1 Cor. 15), and the kind of love it enables and promotes.

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F - L - I - G - H - T

L - On his second missionary journey, Paul came to Corinth—a city known for its depravity—and stayed for a year and a half, working as a tentmaker during the week and preaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath. While he was there, God told him, *“Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city”* (Acts 18:9-10). So Paul ministered boldly to a church torn by divisions, sexual immorality, divorce, and a host of doctrinal issues.

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F - L - I - G - H - T

L - It's understandable that Paul was compelled to write so strongly to a church that had all but completely fallen into the dissolution its city encouraged. Through God's grace, Paul would later be able to rejoice over the church's repentance and acceptance of his God-given authority. First, though, he addressed in this letter a series of practical problems in the Corinthian church.

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I -

- Manifestation of Carnalities in the Church (1-11)**
 - Division in the Church (1-4)
 - Disorder in the Church (5-6)
 - Difficulties in the Church (7-11)
- Spiritualities in the Church (12-16)**
 - Manifestation of Gifts (12-14)
 - Definition of the Gospel (15)
 - Instructions about Giving (16)

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F - L - I - G - H - T

G – Most noteworthy in 1 Corinthians is the clear presentation of the gospel in its basic form in chapter 15. When reduced to its essence, the gospel is an event in history at a certain time, in a certain place, by a certain Person: “Christ died for our sins...He was buried...and...He rose again” (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

Some of these verses may have been used by ancient believers at the time of their baptism as a sort of confession of faith. In abbreviated form, Paul focused on the need for Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection, giving us the very heart of the gospel of the gospel itself.

F - L - I - G - H - T

G – The power of resurrected life in Christ fuels every objective we can have as believers, enabling us to love the way God loves us, with both righteousness and compassion for everyone we meet. Jesus died to make you right with God, and his resurrection makes it possible for you to love like God. Paul made it clear that such love must shine through in everything from marriage to taking communion to giving in support of God’s work to loving your brothers and sisters in Christ.

F - L - I - G - H - T

H – The city of Corinth was a commercial crossroads for the Roman Empire. It became a melting pot of devotees to various pagan cults that was filled with a whole slew of nationalities and thousands of slaves. It was marked by a cultural and moral depravity neither surprising nor unusual in such a large seaport. Greek playwrights coined a phrase, *korinthiazesthai*, “to act like a Corinthian,” which describes a character who was either a drunk, a prostitute, a pimp, or some combination of the three. Spread throughout the city, pagan temples encouraged widespread licentiousness. At one time the temple of Aphrodite was reported to have 1,000 temple prostitutes. And those cultural corruptions seeped into the church at Corinth.

F - L - I - G - H - T

H – The name Corinth means “ornament,” which was more an indication of its commercial value than its physical beauty. Corinth, located on the isthmus connecting the isthmus connecting the Peloponnesian peninsula to mainland Greece, was a natural center of trade and point of exposure to religions and ideas from around the world.

A couple of centuries before Paul’s time, in 146 BC, Corinth was destroyed by the Roman general Lucius Mummius. In 44 BC, Julius Caesar rebuilt the city and quickly reestablished its importance as a trade center for the empire. Paul helped establish the church of Corinth during his second missionary trip (Acts 15-18), sometime around AD 50.

Corinth was a place of athletic contests, second only to Olympia (see the athletic metaphor in 1 Cor. 9:24-27).

F - L - I - G - H - T

T – **Unity should be our goal as Christians.** We might not agree on the nonessential issues of doctrine like what style of worship to use during services, but we should be like-minded when it comes to the core teachings of Scripture, especially regarding Jesus. God uses common men and women to spread an uncommon message: the good news of Jesus Christ. That end goal should never fail to bring us together.

F - L - I - G - H - T

T – **What’s worse: doing wrong or being wronged?** When someone wrongs you, is your first impulse to forgive and let go? Probably not – that’s not natural. But as an act of your will and in compliance and obedience to Jesus (Matt. 39), it is supernaturally possible. Restoration of relationship should always be your goal, because it’s God’s goal.

F-L-I-G-H-T

T – **The church should not mirror the world.** Paul reminded us that we’re no longer to live in sin but instead live differently from the world around us (1 Cor. 6:11). On one hand, we as the church need to take God’s commands seriously, not allowing sin to flourish in our midst. On the other hand, we also need to embrace God’s grace alongside his truth, love those who have fallen into sin, and do what we can to restore them to a right relationship with God and his church, being mindful that God loved us and bought us for himself while we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8).

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F-L-I-G-H-T

T – **Navigate life’s gray areas biblically.** As Paul said, “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify” (1 Cor. 10:23). Consider two limitations: utility and charity. First, is what you’re considering going to help you achieve your ultimate goal of representing Christ, becoming more like him, sharing about him? Second, if you do it, will others be hurt? Don’t put your freedom ahead of someone else’s walk.

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Christ’s Relationship to the Church

Christ is the head of the church, but in Corinth this relationship was dishonored in numerous ways:

- worldly wisdom despises it (1-2)
- factions dishonor it (3-4)
- impurity destroys it (5-6)
- idols defile it (8-9)
- disorder disgraces it (12, 14)
- heresy denies it (15)

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Christ’s Relationship to the Church

On the other hand:

- marriage depicts it (7)
- communion declares it (10-11)
- charity (love) demonstrates it (13)

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Apologetic Value of 1 Corinthians

This book is of great apologetic value for many reasons:

- It is an early book, written only 22 years after the death of Christ.
- The authorship by an apostle and eyewitness of the resurrection is virtually unquestioned, even by the critics.
- Paul refers to some five hundred witnesses of the resurrection, most of whom were still alive, challenging the readers to check it out for themselves.
- Among the eyewitnesses were two unbelievers before the resurrection: James, the brother of Jesus, and Paul, an ardent opponent of Christianity (15:7-8). Few events from antiquity survive in one book with this kind of eyewitness contemporary testimony.

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Foundation of the Church

1 Cor. 3:11 (see also Eph. 2:20) – Who is the foundation of the church, Christ or the apostles?

In this text Paul insists: “No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” On the other hand, Paul told the Ephesians that the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles.” Which is it?

The answer is in the very next phrase of Eph. 2:20: “Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.” Christ is the foundation in a *primary sense*, and his chosen apostles are the foundation in a *secondary sense*. Christ is, as it were, the substructure, and the apostles are the foundation built on the substructure (see Matt. 16:16-18). Christ is the kingpin that holds the apostolic foundation of the church together. It was his *deeds* (death and resurrection) and their *doctrine* about him (see Acts 2:42) that formed the foundation of the Christian church.

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Condemnation of Homosexuality

1 Cor. 6:9-10 – Was Paul’s condemnation of homosexuality merely his private opinion?

Paul told the Corinthians: *“Neither fornicators...nor homosexuals...will inherit the kingdom of God.”* But in the same book, on another issue, he admitted that he was only giving his private “opinion” (1 Cor. 7:25). Paul said, *“I have no commandment from the Lord,”* and *“I [say this], not the Lord”* (v. 12). Was not this also merely Paul’s own nonbinding opinion on the issue?

Paul’s clearest condemnation of homosexuality is in Romans 1:26-27, the divine authority of which is not challenged by anyone who accepts the inspiration of Scripture.

Condemnation of Homosexuality

Paul’s apostolic credentials are firmly established in Scripture. He declared in Galatians that his revelations were not something that man made up, but were *“received...through the revelation of Jesus Christ”* (Gal. 1:12).

Paul declared to the Corinthians that, *“The things that mark an apostle – signs, wonders, and miracles – were done among you”* (2 Cor. 2:12). In short, he had exercised apostolic authority in his ministry to the Corinthian Christians.

Condemnation of Homosexuality

Even here in the book of 1 Corinthians, where Paul’s authority is severely challenged by his critics, his divine authority is made evident in three ways:

- He begins the book by claiming that he has *“words taught by the Spirit”* (1 Cor. 2:13).
- He concludes the book claiming, *“what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command”* (1 Cor. 14:37).
- Even in the disputed chapter 7, where Paul is alleged to be giving his own uninspired opinion, he declares, *“I too have the Spirit of God”* (1 Cor. 7:40). Indeed, when he said, *“I, not the Lord,”* he does not mean his words are not from the Lord; this would contradict everything he says elsewhere. Rather, it means that Jesus did not speak directly to this matter while on earth. But Jesus promised his apostles that he would send the Holy Spirit to *“guide you into all truth”* (John 16:13). And Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians was a fulfillment of that promise.

Running to Obtain a Goal

1 Cor. 9:24 (see Rom. 9:16) – Does Paul encourage or discourage running to obtain a spiritual goal?

In this text Paul encourages the believer to *“run in such a way that you may obtain it.”* However, in Rom. 9:16 Paul informs us that *“it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.”*

The first passage is speaking about **rewards**, which do depend on our works (see 1 Cor. 3:11-17; 2 Cor. 5:10), while the passage in Romans is speaking about **salvation**, which is by grace and not by works (Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-7).

Appear Only to Believers?

1 Cor. 15:5-8 – Did Jesus only appear to unbelievers?

Some critics have attempted to cast doubt on the validity of Christ’s resurrection by insisting that he appeared only to believers but never to unbelievers. Is this so?

Appear Only to Believers?

It is incorrect to claim that Jesus did not appear to unbelievers. This is clear for several reasons:

- He appeared to the most hostile unbeliever of all, Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1-9). The Bible devotes much of several chapters to relate this story (chaps. 9; 22; 26).
- Jesus appeared to some who were not his disciples at all. He appeared to his brother James (1 Cor. 15:7), who with his other brothers, was not a believer before the resurrection (John 7:5).
- Even Jesus’ disciples were unbelievers in the resurrection when he first appeared to them. When Mary Magdalene and others reported that Jesus was resurrected, *“their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them”* (Luke 24:11). Later Jesus had to chide the two disciples on the road to Emmaus about disbelief in his resurrection: *“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!”* (v. 25).

Appear Only to Believers?

- Even after Jesus had appeared to the women, to Peter, to the two disciples, and to the ten apostles, still Thomas said, *“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it”* (John 20:25). He was hardly a believer in the resurrection.

So it is simply false to claim that Jesus did not appear to unbelievers.

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Only to a Few?

1 Cor. 15:5-8 – Why did Jesus appear only to a select few?

Some critics have suggested that the fact only a few saw Jesus after his resurrection indicates that he was essentially invisible to the human eye and only materialized to a few people on select occasions. But this is contrary to the orthodox contention that Jesus’ resurrection was literal and physical.

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Only to a Few?

- Jesus did not appear to only a few people. He appeared to more than 500 people (1 Cor. 15:6), including many women, his own apostles, his brother James, and to Saul of Tarsus (the chief anti-Christian of the day).
- Jesus did not simply appear on a few occasions. He appeared on at least 12 different occasions. These were spread over a 40-day period of time (Acts 1:3) and in many different geographical locations.
- Jesus did not allow just anyone to lay hands on him, even before his resurrection. On one occasion, an unbelieving crowd tried to take Jesus and *“throw him down over the cliff. Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way”* (Luke 4:28-30; John 8:59; 10:39).

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Only to a Few?

- Even before his resurrection, Jesus was selective about those for whom he performed miracles. He refused to perform miracles in his own home area *“because of their unbelief”* (Matt. 13:58). Jesus even disappointed Herod, who had hoped to see him perform a miracle (Luke 23:8). The truth is that Jesus refused to cast pearls before swine (Matt. 7:6). In submission to the Father’s will (John 5:30), he was sovereign over his activity both before and after his resurrection. But in no way does this prove that he was essentially invisible and immaterial either before or after his resurrection.

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First to Be Resurrected?

1 Cor. 15:20 – Was Jesus the first one ever to be resurrected from the dead?

The Bible seems to claim here that Christ was the first one ever to rise from the dead, calling him *“the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”* However, there are many other resurrections recorded in the Bible before Jesus’ resurrection, both in the OT (see 1 Kings 17:22; 2 Kings 13:21) and in the NT (see John 11:43-44). How then could Jesus’ resurrection be the first one?

When Jesus returned from the dead, it was the first real **resurrection**. Every other raising from the dead was merely a **resuscitation** or **revivification** of a dead body. There are some crucial differences between a true resurrection and a mere resuscitation.

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First to Be Resurrected?

- A resurrection is to an immortal body, whereas a resuscitation is merely a mortal body coming back to life (see 1 Cor. 15:53). Before Christ, Lazarus and everyone else who was raised from the dead died again eventually. When Christ was raised, it was declared that he was *“alive forevermore”* (Rev. 1:18).
- Further, resurrection bodies manifest some supernatural qualities, not inherent in mortal bodies, such as the ability to appear and disappear from sight immediately (Luke 24:31) or to get inside a closed room (John 20:19).

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First to Be Resurrected?

- Finally, while a resurrection is more than a resuscitation, it was not less than one. Resuscitated corpses die again, but Jesus' resurrection body was immortal. He conquered death (1 Cor. 15:54-55; Heb. 2:14), whereas bodies that are merely resuscitated will eventually be conquered by death.
- However, the fact that Jesus was the first to be raised in an immortal body does not mean it was an immaterial body. It was more than a reanimation of a material corpse, but it was not less than that. It was his same body of "flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39).

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Same Person or a Different One?

1 Cor. 15:35-38 – Is Paul teaching that the resurrection body is a different one from the one that is sown – a kind of reincarnation?

According to verse 37, we "do not sow that body that shall be." Some take this to mean the resurrection body is a different one, a "spiritual" body (v. 44) that is not essentially material. Does this prove that we are not raised in the same physical body of flesh and bones in which we die?

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Same Person or a Different One?

There are real changes in the resurrection body, but it is not changed into a nonphysical body – one substantially different from the one we possess now. The seed that goes into the ground brings forth more seeds that are the same kind, not immaterial seeds. It is in this sense that Paul can say "you do not sow [cause to die] that body that shall be" (v. 37), since it is immortal and cannot die. The body that is raised is different in that it is immortal (1 Cor. 15:53) not in that it is immaterial. Of his resurrection body Jesus said, "It is I myself. Handle me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have" (Luke 24:39).

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Same Person or a Different One?

There are many reasons for holding that the resurrection body, though transformed and glorified, is the *numerically same body* of flesh and bones Jesus possessed before his resurrection. And since our resurrection bodies will be like his (Phil. 3:21), the same is true of the believer's resurrection body.

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Same Person or a Different One?

Notice these characteristics of Jesus resurrection body:

- It was the same body with the crucifixion scars it had from before the resurrection (Luke 24:39; John 20:27).
- It was the same body that left the empty tomb behind (Matt. 28:6; John 20:5-7; see John 2:18-22).
- The physical body of Jesus did not corrupt in the tomb (Acts 2:31).
- Jesus said the same body that is destroyed will be built up again (John 2:19-22).
- The immortal body is "put on" over, but does not replace, the mortal body (1 Cor. 15:53).
- The plant that springs forth from the seed is both, genetically and physically connected with the seed. What is sown is what is reaped (1 Cor. 15:37-38).

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Same Person or a Different One?

- It is the same body of "flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39) that could be touched (Matt. 28:9; John 20:27) and could eat physical food (Luke 24:41-42).
- The "change" Paul referred to at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:51) is a change *in* the body not a change *of* the body. The changes in the resurrection are changes in *secondary* qualities not changes in *primary* qualities. It is changed from a corruptible physical body to an incorruptible physical body. It is not changed from a physical body into a nonphysical body. It is changed from a mortal to an immortal physical body, but it is not changed from a material to an immaterial body.

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Material or Immaterial Body?

1 Cor. 15:44 – Is the resurrection body material or immaterial?

Paul declares that the resurrection body is a “spiritual body,” but a spiritual body is an immaterial body. However, elsewhere the Bible says Jesus’ resurrection was made of “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39).

A “spiritual” body denotes an immortal body not an immaterial body. A “spiritual” body is one dominated by the spirit not one devoid of matter. The Greek word *pneumatikos* (translated “spiritual” here) means a body directed by the Spirit, as opposed to one under the dominion of the flesh. It is not ruled by flesh that perishes but by the spirit that endures (1 Cor. 15:50-58). So “spiritual body” does not mean immaterial and invisible, but immortal and imperishable. This is clear from several facts:

Material or Immaterial Body?

Parallelism mentioned by Paul

	Pre-resurrection Body	Post-resurrection Body
1 Cor. 15:40	earthly	heavenly
1 Cor. 15:42	perishable	imperishable
1 Cor. 15:43	weak	powerful
1 Cor. 15:44	natural	spiritual (supernatural)
1 Cor. 15:53	mortal	immortal

Material or Immaterial Body?

The complete text indicates that “spiritual” (*pneumatikos*) could be translated “supernatural” in contrast to “natural.” This is made clear by the parallels of perishable and imperishable and corruptible and incorruptible. In fact, this same Greek word (*pneumatikos*) is translated “supernatural” in 1 Cor. 10:4 (RSV) when it speaks of the “supernatural rock which followed them [in the wilderness].”

Second, the word “spiritual” (*pneumatikos*) in 1 Corinthians refers to material objects. Paul spoke of the “spiritual Rock” that followed Israel in the wilderness from which they got “spiritual drink” (1 Cor. 10:4). But the OT story reveals that it was a physical rock from which they got literal water to drink (Exod. 17:1-7; Num. 20:2-13). The actual water they drank from that material rock was produced supernaturally.

Material or Immaterial Body?

When Jesus supernaturally made bread for the 5,000 (John 6:1-14), he made literal bread. However, this literal, material bread could have been called “spiritual” bread (because of its supernatural source) in the same way that the literal manna given to Israel is called “spiritual food” (1 Cor. 10:3).

Further, when Paul spoke about a spiritual man (2:15), obviously he did not mean an invisible, immaterial man with no corporeal body. He was speaking of a flesh and blood human being whose life was lived by the supernatural power of God. He was referring to a literal person whose life was Spirit directed. A spiritual man is one who is taught by the Spirit and who receives the things that come from the Spirit of God (vv. 13-15).

Material or Immaterial Body?

The resurrection body can be called a “spiritual body” in much the same way we speak of the Bible as a “spiritual book.” Regardless of their spiritual source and power, both the resurrection body and the Bible are material objects.

Can Flesh and Blood Enter the Kingdom?

1 Cor. 15:50 – If flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of God, how can there be a physical resurrection?

The Bible speaks of the resurrection of the physical body from the grave (John 5:28-29), which is composed of “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39) and which leaves an empty tomb behind (Matt. 28:6). However, according to this verse, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.”

To conclude from this phrase that the resurrection body will not be a body of physical flesh is without biblical justification. First of all, the very next phrase omitted from the above quotation of verse 50 clearly indicates that Paul is not speaking of flesh as such, but of *corruptible* flesh. For he adds, “nor does corruption inherit incorruption.” So Paul is not affirming that the resurrection body will not have flesh; he is saying it will not have *perishable* flesh.

Can Flesh and Blood Enter the Kingdom?

To convince the frightened disciples that he was not an immaterial spirit (Luke 24:37), Jesus emphatically told them: *“Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have”* (Luke 24:39). Peter declared that the resurrection body would be the same body of flesh that went into the tomb and never saw corruption (Acts 2:31). Paul also reaffirmed this truth in a parallel passage (Acts 13:35). And John implies that it is against Christ to deny that he remains *“in the flesh”* even after his resurrection (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7).

Can Flesh and Blood Enter the Kingdom?

This conclusion cannot be avoided by claiming that Jesus' resurrection body had flesh and bones but not flesh and blood. For if it had flesh and bones, then it was a literal, material body, whether or not it had blood. “Flesh and bones” stresses the solidity of Jesus' physical post-resurrection body. They are more obvious signs of tangibility than blood, which cannot be as easily seen or touched.

Can Flesh and Blood Enter the Kingdom?

The phrase “flesh and blood” in this context apparently means *mortal* flesh and blood, that is, a mere human being. This is supported by parallel uses in the NT. When Jesus said to Peter, *“Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you”* (Matt. 16:17), he could not have been referring to the mere substance of the body as such, which obviously could not reveal that he was the Son of God.

The most natural interpretation of 1 Cor. 15:50 seems to be that *humans, as they now are, earthbound and perishable creatures*, cannot have a place in God's glorious, heavenly kingdom.