

How Are The Dead Raised?

1 Corinthians, Vol. 35

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1 Corinthians 15:29-49

1 Corinthians 15 starts with **the gospel**, which is inextricably connected to the resurrection (verses 1-4). This was the gospel which was preached immediately upon the arrival of the Holy Spirit, as described in Acts 2. It had never changed, and is exactly the same today as it was when preached by Peter, James, John, Philip, Stephen, and Paul. The end of the first paragraph in 1 Corinthians 15 affirms that the message had not changed:

1 Corinthians 15:11: *Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.*

So we preach and **so you believed** refers to the gospel in verses 3-4.

Now we move to the final arguments on the certainty of resurrection, and to the nature of the resurrected body you will one day occupy, for eternity. It's a long passage, but we do best to drink it in one gulp so we don't bog down along the way.

I. **The Certainty Of Resurrection** (29-34)

1 Corinthians 15:29: *Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?*

There are somewhere between 30 and 40 interpretations offered for this verse. Some of the more prominent ones include:

- > Vicarious baptism to benefit people who died unsaved and un-baptized.
- > Baptism to secure reunion with Christian relatives after death.
- > Baptism for someone terminally ill, who cannot physically be baptized.
- > Baptism prompted by the testimony of the lives of Christian martyrs.
- > A bevy of esoteric ideas about baptism washing away deadly sins, or to express oneness with dead believers, or simply to confess belief in resurrection of the dead because baptism symbolized death and resurrection, *á lá* Romans 6.

Here are things to consider as you wrestle with this verse:

- > Whatever the meaning, it has to fit the context. That eliminates most of the interpretations proposed over the centuries. Whatever it means, it has to be relevant to an argument for the resurrection of the dead.

- > Whatever it means, it has to fit with the meaning of the words and the grammar of the text. It has to involve something **for the sake of** or **on behalf of** the dead, since that's the meaning of the preposition translated **for**.
- > It has to be related to an existing practice with which the Corinthians were familiar. Since Paul mentions it but does not explain it, we know the practice was understood by his readers. The two possibilities are that it was either a pagan practice, or it was a perversion of Christian baptism.

Three comments and we'll move on.

- > All advocates of vicarious baptism in the first few centuries after Christ were **heretics**. Vicarious baptism never was practiced in mainstream Christianity.
- > It is intellectually and exegetically **dishonest** to twist this verse into a command. Paul used it as an illustration, but he says nothing to hint that he approved of it or that he wanted anyone to do it.
- > The Mormon practice of vicarious baptism for the dead is **not at all supported** by this verse, or anything else in the Bible. They believe the practice originated with a revelation given to Joseph Smith. They reference this verse, but there's no way to twist it into a command.

Remember, 29-34 is about **The Certainty of Resurrection**.

1 Corinthians 15:30-32: *Why are we also in danger every hour? I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE.*

1 Corinthians 15:33: *Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."*

The obvious application is *"Don't hang around with people who deny the resurrection."* A person who denies the Jesus rose bodily from the grave or that all people will rise from the grave should not be tolerated in any Christian church because their so-called "gospel" is anti-Christian.

1 Corinthians 15:34: *Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.*

II. **The Nature of Resurrection** (35-49)

1 Corinthians 15:35: *But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?"*

What about the fact that bodies decay after death? The answer is about to unfold:

- > God is in control of that
- > The resurrection is a transformation to an entirely new sphere of existence

1 Corinthians 15:36-38: *You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own.*

Think of burying a dead body as analogous to planting a seed.

1 Corinthians 15:39: *All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish.*

1 Corinthians 15:40-41: *There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly 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.*

1 Corinthians 15:42-44: *So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.*

The resurrection body will be very different! You will be:

Transformed from **perishable** to **imperishable**
Transformed from **dishonor** to **glory**
Transformed from **weakness** to **power**
Transformed from **natural** to **spiritual**

Romans 7:24-25a: *Wretched man that I am! Who will **set me free from the body of this death**? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

1 Corinthians 15:45: *So also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.*

John 5:21: *For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.*

1 Corinthians 15:46-49: *However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.*

We get a few glimpses of what our resurrection bodies will be like from the times we see Jesus after He rose:

It was a physical body
He ate and drank
He was recognizable
He could move instantly from place to place

<p>Are you in? Do you believe the gospel? Do you yearn to be set free from the body of this death? Are you in Christ, or are you still in Adam?</p>
