

# WHAT'S AFTER ATX

EXEGETICAL NOTES:

## EVIDENCE FOR THE AFTERLIFE

### A. *1 Corinthians 15:35-58*

#### CONTEXT

We are coming in right at the very end of the book of 1 Corinthians, so it is important that we lay some context. In the book, Paul seems to be addressing many of the concerns, questions and sins of the church at Corinth. There are many places throughout the book where Paul says, “Now concerning...,” which indicates he was addressing issues of the church. He has already addressed the betrothed, food offered to idols, spiritual gifts.

As he comes to the close of the letter, he wants to refresh their memories on what the gospel is (15:1), that “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (v. 3), and that he appeared to many (v. 5-8). With that said, Paul makes it clear that Jesus being resurrected is fundamental to the gospel.

That naturally leads him to address another concern of the church. It seems that at least some in the Corinthian church held that there was no resurrection of the dead (v. 12). Paul powerfully argues that if there is no resurrection, then there is no salvation (v. 13-32).

## *B. 1 Corinthians 15:35-41*

### **AN ANSWER TO AN OBJECTION**

In our passage, Paul addresses either a hypothetical or real objection. This objection seems to be concerned with the mechanics of resurrection: how can a deteriorating body be raised? For Jews, dead bodies were unclean and could only make other things unclean since death came as a result of sin (Gen. 2:17; Num. 5:2). For Greeks, the body was inferior and even evil in comparison to spirit, so why would God keep us in a body? So, to Paul's readers there would be an understandable concern if God simply gives life to a corpse. No one wants the living dead.

Paul answers harshly by calling the objector a fool. Such a sharp answer shows how important the truth is, how serious such an objection was since it was borne out of unbelief in the power and promise of God.

### **A COMPARISON**

Then he answers by drawing a comparison to plants. When you sow a seed in the ground, what happens at harvest? Is the same seed raised up? No, the seed dies, and a plant is raised. The concept of one thing becoming something different and more glorious is not foreign to God's creation.

Our familiarity with nature blunts the wonder of such an amazing thing. We see so much we don't see any more. How does something as majestic as a mighty oak come from something so insignificant as an acorn? A plant might have to be buried and watered in good soil, but only God can make it grow the growth. Modern science might be able to explain the mechanics of how it happens, but it can't really answer why it happens.

### **A DIFFERENCE**

After pointing out a similarity, Paul points out differences. He points to more things in creation: people, land animals, birds, fish, the sun, the moon and stars. Each of these has a different splendor, or substance. Each has a different make up. The concept of different make ups is also not foreign to God's creation.

## *C. 1 Corinthians 15:42-53*

### **DIFFERENT AND BETTER BODIES**

Paul now shifts into his teaching. As there are different splendors in creation now, there will be a different splendor in the resurrection of the dead. Paul contrasts the body as it is now with what it will be. Right now, the body is corruptible (not just physically but also morally), dishonorable, weak, and natural. But after it is sown in

death, it will be raised incorruptible, honorable, powerful, and spiritual.

By spiritual, Paul does not mean that we won't have bodies. Paul insists on a bodily resurrection—there is no shadowy sort of spiritual existence. The resurrection will be bodily. Leon Morris comments, “Paul’s insistence on the body should not be overlooked...It is fundamental to Paul’s thought that the after-life will be infinitely more glorious than this one.”<sup>1</sup> Paul could agree with Greek thinking that the afterlife would be incorruptible, but he differed in that it would be bodily.

But Paul’s point is that the body we will have will be different—just like a seed after it has sprouted is different and just like there are different types of flesh in creation. When you are resurrected, you won’t be only raised into the same body you are in now with the same problems, you will be raised into an infinitely more glorious one. God does not simply reverse any decomposition of the body—he glorifies it and it will be different that our current bodies and far better than we can imagine.

Even right now our bodies are amazing, but they are still frail. You can exercise and eat right, you get toned and swole, but no matter what, your body is a weak vessel. Just think of it in comparison to the human mind. Long after your body begins to break down and deteriorate, your mind can be just as sharp as ever. But as weak as this body of ours is, it will be that much more powerful in the resurrection.

## **EXAMPLE OF THE FIRST AND LAST ADAM**

Paul now refers to Scripture to back up his point that there will be a difference in our post resurrection body. He alludes to Gen. 2:7, when the Lord fashions man from the dust of the ground, and then breathes into his nostrils the breath of life. It was with that breath that man became a living being. The same breath of life was passed on to each of Adam’s descendants so that what is true of Adam is true of us—he passed on his nature to us.

But Paul contrasts the first Adam with the last, that he became a “life-giving spirit.” What he seems to mean is that in the same way that Adam become the first of all natural creatures, Jesus became the first of all supernatural creatures. And Jesus isn’t the “second” Adam, but the “last” Adam—there is a finality with him that is not found in the first, and a first necessitates a last.

Jesus is “heavenly” not just in origin, but in quality. In the same way, we are earthly in origin and quality. But through becoming connected to Christ by faith, we to some degree become heavenly, though what we will be is yet to be revealed. Our bodies and natures will be different. We bear the image of Adam now by sharing in his nature, but we will one day bear the image of Jesus. We can be spiritual to some degree now, but there is no room for having “arrived” in this life.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Leon Morris, 1 Corinthians, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 218.

2. Craig L. Blomberg, 1 Corinthians, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 319.



Then Paul speaks emphatically, declaring to them that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom. This is a major problem for us if we want heaven—we cannot inherit in our own flesh. But he continues that emphatic tone and discloses a mystery to them: we will be changed when Christ returns. And it won't be a long affair like a growing plant from a seed, instead it will be instantaneous.

## *D. 1 Corinthians 15:54-58*

### **TAUNTING DEATH**

The resurrection has been in the works a long time, and since the beginning God his plan has been to crush the head of the serpent and undo the effects of the Fall. Since mortal must be swallowed up in immortality, then Isa. 25:8 will come to pass, and we be able to taunt death in our victory.

When Christ returns, Death will no longer have a sting for believers. It isn't so much that death is the problem—sin is since, “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Sin makes death a serious threat for us in that if we die in sin we will be forever separated from God. But praise God, Christ kept the law on our behalf and died in our place, so even though we may die, death has no power over us to keep us from being resurrected. Death is harmless now to those who are in Christ.

### **CONCLUSION**

Therefore, Paul exhorts the church to stand firm, to let nothing move them, and to continue in the work of the Lord. There is no reason to fear death since it is simply a necessary step to bring eternal life. We can also have solid assurance that what we do now will not be lost when we pass away since they will have eternal significance for all of us who are resurrected.

Christians should be able to stand firm in the face of any trial or threat that might end in death. The rest of the world may fear, but we are not like those who have no hope. We have put all our faith in the One who was victorious over death and the grave, and we can have a firm assurance that he will raise us on the last day into bodies so much more glorious than we can ever imagine.