

The Resurrection of the Body

By Paris Reidhead*

Will you turn please back to I Corinthians chapter 15 verses 35 thru 50. Our text is the portion that we read. I shant read it again I trust it is still fresh in your mind. The subject, the Resurrection of the Body of tremendous importance to all of us, Verse 35 presents to us two questions: "Some men will say, How are the dead raised up?" Verse 12 gives the reason for this. The some men, he identifies as a company in the Church of Corinth, "How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" I am afraid that if Paul were to be writing today, he would have to change this. Writing to a church or church leaders. Instead of saying, "How say some of you that there is no resurrection," he would have to say, "How say most of you, Protestant preachers, seminary professors and denominational leaders, that there is no resurrection of the dead?"

It is reported that there are 1,700 Protestant churches in New York City. The liberal ecumenical leaders gleefully report that only 400 of this 1,700 are evangelical and then they hasten to state, and some of those are "on the fence" theologically. In order to be ordained into anyone of these Protestant denominations, which comprise most of the 1,700, every pastor must pledge allegiance to a statement of doctrine that is orthodox and Biblical and Scriptural and yet it is done with a mental reservation, a calculated dishonesty, wherein they are advised to affirm their loyalty to it realizing that it is not expected for them to keep their vow.

On Easter Sunday morning, just a few weeks ago, a lady spoke to one of the leading pastors in our City at the close of the service. Her question was something like this, "Pastor, can you help me make sense out of the resurrection? I just can't understand how Christ rose from the dead and really, does it make any difference after all?" And this man, whose name would be known to most of you, said, "Nobody really knows if He ever did rise from the dead. Personally, I don't believe He did. But, after all, as you say, it doesn't make any difference anyway."

It does make a difference. The very foundation of Christianity rests on the Resurrection, of the bodily, physical Resurrection of Christ from the dead. For Paul said, "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins" (I Cor. 15:17). It does make a difference. We expect atheists to deny the Resurrection, we obviously must expect all Communists to do so, but need we expect Protestant ministers to be preaching practical atheism and to be destroying the very foundation of Christianity by denying the Resurrection of Christ from the dead?

You see the denial of the Resurrection of Christ is also denial of the resurrection of the bodies of men: "If Christ be not raise, then the dead rise not." Denial of the resurrection of the body is the denial of the immortality of the soul. If there is no immortality, than believe me, there is no real virtue. It was *Ernest Renan*, the great French historian, best known for his famous work, "The History of the People of Israel," who said, this to his credit, "Let us not deceive ourselves, man is governed by nothing but his conception of the future. Any nation which in masse gives up all faith in what lies beyond the grave will become utterly degraded."

There is a growing volume of evidence that seems to prove that America is behaving as such a nation. Our growing national immortality is a reflection of our growing national unbelief in immortality of the human soul and body. Immorality springs out of denial of immortality. The FBI has reported that in the past ten years there has been an 800 per cent increase in juvenile delinquency in our land. Growing alcoholism plus growing per capita consumption of alcoholic beverages, increasing sex crimes, accelerating divorce rate, and an apathy on the part of the citizens concerning these menaces, seem to indicate that America is an atheistic land which is drunkenly chanting, "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we shall die, as the dogs the scientists we are."

The Apostle Paul predicted that this would be the natural and only rational attitude of a people, which having known of the Resurrection of the body, deny this truth. Amazingly, Paul actually cites the arguments that are used in those days and still today against the resurrection of the body, "But how say some of you; How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?" (I Cor. 15:12) Now the very form in which this question is couched in the Greek indicates that the one asking it

didn't expect an answer. Did not expect an answer; but he was using his question as a denial of the possibility of the resurrection of the body. Let me paraphrase what actually is implied in the language of the text. "It is an incredible thing that dead bodies, which have been dead for thousands of years, long ago reduced to dust; and the dust has undergone a thousand forms; that such bodies as have been burned to ashes, or have been killed, and eaten and digested by wild animals, should ever be raised again such a doctrine is beyond belief." This is what is involved in the question, "How are the dead raised up?"

Now Paul uses verses 36 to 38 to answer the questions. "Some will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, Thou fool,..." He uses first his privilege of expressing his intellectual contempt for people that make a question that is answerable serve as the denial of the possibility (I Cor. 15:35). "Thou fool," Are you trying to make a joke of the resurrection and to turn the laugh upon believers by stating that the dead body will be patched together again from the dust, once more to begin its rounds of eating and drinking, digesting and eliminating, sleeping and working, begetting and keeping house? What a fool to think of the resurrection in so pitiful a way! This is a caricature and not a reality. Let me read the words, "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body" (I Cor. 15:36-38).

Paul sends the objector to the farmer, to the husbandman, to the field, to learn how to answer the question. "What thou, thyself sowest is not quickened, except it die." Why, says Paul, the fool refutes himself every time he sows a seed. A small, bare, naked grain of wheat is buried in the earth and there it dies; but it comes up again! Not the body he buried, but a new and wonderful life in some mysterious way comes up out of the old body. Paul says further that there is no greater mystery in the resurrection of the human body than there is in the coming again of a new manifestation of life from a grain buried in the soil.

Let me give you a word from Chrysostom, who in the fourth century wisely and well wrote, "Let us not bewail the departed, but rather those that have ended their life ill. For so the husband, when he sees the grain dissolving, does not mourn. Rather as long as he beholds it continuing solid in the ground, he is in fear and trembling, but when he sees it dissolved rejoices. For the beginning of the future crop is this dissolving."

The Apostle's implications from this are perfectly clear. You foolish ones. Are you going to stand and say that since there are mysteries in connection with the resurrection of the body that you don't understand that you are going to deny it? Why if you do, why do you not also say that since there are mysteries in the processes of nature which you do not understand, that, therefore, you will not believe in the harvest." Just as essential. There is no greater mystery in the resurrection of the body than there is in the planting of grain which returns with new life and a new body. All the vast harvest fields of earth are witnesses to the activity and the power of God, taking hold of death and transmuting it into life, giving a new life and a new body to the grain that was sown. So, said he, with the human body, in the resurrection, God will bring out of death that kind of body that it pleases Him to give.

What kind of a body will it be? Do we have any idea? Yes, bless God, we do. "...we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (I Joh. 3:2). We know the kind of a body we're going to have, for it will be like unto His own body of glory. It won't be this one patched up by some magnetism where God reaches out and gathers the molecules of chemical that compose it now. But it will be a body which He gives just as He gives a body to the grain that is sown.

Now, the Apostle's answer to the second question that we have. "...with what body do they come?" He begins to answer the question by calling attention to the infinite variety of the work of God. See how many forms of bodies there are to be found on an earthly level. There is one flesh of man, another of beast, another of birds, and another of fishes. All of these different kinds of bodies God has made. My friend, can't you tell the difference between them? Just their flesh. You know that when you take on your fork something handed to you to eat that by looking at it and by the taste of it, you can tell whether it be beef or lamb, whether it be lamb or chicken, or whether it be chicken or fish, for each has its distinctive and characteristic qualities. To God gave it these qualities in order that it might be adapted to the environment that it inhabits. So says Paul, God is going to give a body adapted to the environment that you will inhabit. Do you see?

See how many different kinds of bodies have been fitted for space above. The sun, the moon, the stars, the planets, all having their place, each its separate form and function and God made them all.

May I remind you that whatever the body seems to be, or actually is, its purpose is always something bigger than itself. This is the great travesty of humanity that makes as the end of its being the sustenance of its body. Oh, that somehow we as Christian people can be liberated from the intolerable bondage to the flesh that makes a comfortable house of wood and stone to house it, and comfortable furniture to support it, and comfortable clothes to cover it and nourishing food to sustain it, the end of our being. Beloved, there is something fuller, richer, nobler for humanity than just to be a globule of human protoplasm clinging to the rock of time. There's something nobler for you than to keep yourself clothed and warm and healthy. This is not the end of God's grace. This is not the purpose of His providence and this is not His plan for you. To make the things of the world as the end of our being is to prostitute humanity for a purpose infinitely inferior to what God designed. That which is of significance to you is not the corporeal house you inhabit any more than the house of wood that you live in, or stone, if it should be such. Every purpose of a body is for a higher function than the sustaining of itself. It is for the purpose of revealing the kind of life that it possesses. And it is perfectly willing to be consumed in that revelation, for even as the sun has as its purpose the giving of heat and of light it is consumed by it. The purpose itself is so much nobler than the preservation of itself. And so, it comes to this, that the purpose of your humanity, of your redeemed humanity is not to simply sustain and protect your humanity, but from the innermost being out of love for Christ there can flow that revealed love of God which will be manifest in service, and in witness and that your body becomes a means to an end rather than the end itself. Always the purpose of body is to reveal and, therefore, since God has given us bodies so marvelously adapted to our environment, be absolutely as certain of this, that when He gives us new bodies they will be equally well adapted to that environment for which they are being designed. And there again, the body shall not be its own end but the purpose of the body will be to reveal blood redeemed, transformed spirit in the manner in which it deserves. Remember the end of the body, therefore, is not itself but its purpose, its means of manifesting that life which is its own. God has given everything the kind of a body it pleased Him to give so He will give us in the resurrection the kind of a body that it pleases Him to give.

Notice these several observations that Paul makes about the resurrection of the body. "There is so is," He begins, "So is the resurrection of the body." "It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption." You know full well that from the moment you begin to live you begin to die. And one writer has well stated that the mournful dirge of the pulse through the human system is "nearer death," "nearer death," "nearer death." Wherein is the tragic consequence of wishing your life away. Oh how many there are that say, "Would God that summer were over and fall had come, and would God that fall would pass and winter would come, and that winter would go that spring may come," They spend their entire life wishing away the days and hours that God has given them. "This is the day the Lord has made. Rejoice in it and be glad," regardless of the temperature, regardless of the situation, because every time your pulse beats it's one less pulse beat that you will have in time and you are that much nearer eternity (Psa. 118:24). You are as young today as you will ever be. You are as handsome as you will ever be. You are as youthful as you'll ever be. From now on you're nearer death; even by the time it's taking me to say it. Your body is a corruptible body. It will one day be sown in dishonor, testifying to its weakness and its frailty, but it will be raised in glory. "It will be sown in weakness; but it will be raised in power: It was sown a natural body; it will be raised a spiritual body. So it is written" (I Cor. 15:44-45). "So it is written." Paul show with a great sweep over history how all this came to be. He tells us that, "The first man Adam was made a living soul;" "a living soul", of the earth, earthy, with a natural soul-controlled body. But "the last Adam the Lord Jesus Christ was made a quickening spirit," a life giving Spirit (I Cor. 15:45). This is our Lord Jesus. The first Adam, the last Adam; the first man, and the last man, the second man, the Lord from heaven. Just as from Adam through natural generation we have received physical bodies, natural bodies, corruptible, weak bodies; so through the Lord Jesus Christ we shall receive spiritual bodies, incorruptible bodies, glorious bodies like unto His own. By natural generation our body is like Adam's, by super-natural generation, and by the grace of God, our body will be like Christ's. This we need to understand.

Do you realize the implications of this? For a moment go back to that day when our Lord Jesus met His disciples in the upper room. Where the door was locked. Why? For fear of the Jews. Now listen, that locked door didn't keep Him out because His was a glorified body. Just as they did not need to roll the stone away to let the Lord Jesus out. They didn't roll that stone away to let Him out. They rolled the stone away to prove and show He wasn't there. How can this be? Well there are a lot of things

we don't understand and I'm not scientist enough to give you any comparisons. Suffice it for me to say, that He came out of the tomb with a glorified physical body of flesh and bone without having the door opened to let him out; and He came into the upper room in a body of flesh and bone without having the door opened to let Him in. He has a spiritual body. Real? Yes. Material? Yes. But of such a nature that at His will He could be from place to place. At His will He could eat, but He wasn't dependent upon food for sustenance. His life was not in the blood. Your life today is in the blood. But in the case of our Lord Jesus, the life was in the spirit, not in the blood. In that day when you have a body, it will be not dependent upon blood, it will be a life giving spirit who will give life to you and with that a body like unto His own body of glory.

But now notice, as Paul has answered these questions; so he establishes a principle which makes the resurrection of the body indispensable in God's plan. Let me read this 50th verse Remember what I said, he's establishing here a principle which makes the resurrection of the body indispensable in God's plan. "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot..." (Do you see the word?) "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption" (I Cor. 15:50). This is the principle. It cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Now remember His body, it was a body of flesh and bones. We hear this from His own lips in Luke 24:39, "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." The life is in the spirit and not in the blood. Flesh and bones inherit the kingdom of God, but not flesh and blood. Flesh and blood cannot inherit it for with the blood the life is thus in the blood, but in the resurrection body the life will be in the spirit. Now, through His indwelling presence the kingdom of God is in us. In us. We are part of His kingdom though He Himself is in the glory. We are here in a sense as the extraterritorial rights of the Lord Jesus. Now you don't find this too much, but there was a time in history, after the opening of China to trade with the rest of the world, when certain governments; namely and largely Great Britain, were given extraterritorial rights in China. For instance, in Peking, I am told, there was a district several blocks square which was England in China. The people had English customs and English practice. There were English "bobbies" patrolling the street. There was an English flag flying over it, English law governed the people, English taxes were collected. It was England in China, extraterritorial rights. This is exactly what our Lord Jesus has said about you. This kingdom, this world system as we see it belongs to Satan. He is the God of this world and the ruler of this world. He is the prince of this world and certainly has nothing in Christ. When you come to Christ, you are translated out of the kingdom of this world into the kingdom of His dear Son. You yourself become part of that kingdom and, in a sense, where you are Jesus Christ has extraterritorial rights in the dominion of Satan. So in that sense the kingdom of God is in you. You are the kingdom of God. In that sense in which He reigns in you His law governs you in the midst of an alien government with another law and another principle of operation. You, therefore, are the kingdom of God. His extraterritorial rights in the domain still administered by Satan; but, there's another sense in which this is true. The kingdom of God is in us. Is in us. Well, why? Well, "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but the kingdom of God is in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17). And when you are born again, when you are made a partaker of the divine nature, when you pass from death to life; the King Himself by the Spirit is in you and because He is there, He lets the sweet effects of His dominion extend into your life; and there's joy and there's peace and there's blessing because the King is in you by the Holy Ghost; then all of the sweet heavenly blessings of His domain which will one day be extended in wide reign are now yours. And you, therefore, who are the children of God, now hear me, you, therefore, who are the children of God, during these days of time can have in your experience, in your heart, in your life, all of the spiritual blessings that will come when Christ returns. Because the Kingdom of God is in us, the King is in us and, therefore, without any regard for the environment about us and the circumstances that surround us we can have heaven begun in our hearts today. Are you living that way?

You see God's great purpose was that having the Kingdom of God in you in the midst of the dominion of Satan and having the Kingdom of God in you and His presence radiating all of the benefits of His reign, you should be there as a sample of His beneficence and His wisdom and His power and His grace and His love; and people should want to transfer from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light; from the kingdom of death into the kingdom of life; from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God, because they have met you. Do you see? That's why He said we are to be filled with the fullness of God; for only when we are filled with the fullness of God do we become that display to those that are without Christ that it will cause them to want to transfer allegiance. Oh, not like that man that professional golfer down in Chattanooga, Tennessee talking with Perry Branon, one of our pastor friends, and he said to him, "Tom, when are you going to come to Christ?" He said, "Listen, Perry, you know that I've known you all my life; I can't remember when I didn't know you," and he said, "I'd like to be a

Christian, but my wife says she's a Christian. She says she's going to go to heaven. The people that I've seen are like her. If there's anybody that I ever met that's complaining and small, and mean and little, and critical and selfish, and proud and arrogant, it's my wife; and Perry if heaven is going to be made up of people like my wife, I'd rather be in hell. I've lived too close to a Christian to ever want to be one." The next week he was found in the car that had crashed into a bridge abutment between Dayton, Tennessee and Chattanooga and the presence of another man, a married man both of them with other women other than their wives, and the four of them were dead. The last words he had ever said were, "If heaven is made up of people like my wife, I don't want to go there." Can you not see why Jesus Christ has made as His purpose to live in His own, that living in them He can reveal His grace through them and cause others to want to know Him because they know them? Do you see? The kingdom of God cannot be inherited by flesh and blood because that which makes you distinctively His is not come from nature; but it comes from grace. It comes by His Spirit. It's not your personality; but it's His presence that changes you from a caricature of Christ into a witness for Him that causes others to want to know Him.

And then ultimately, of course, the third aspect of this kingdom will be when the King Himself returns to gather to Him those who are His and thus establish His kingdom visibly for others to see as He Himself raised. Now because He is personally and spiritually by the Holy Ghost in you, the kingdom of God is a reality in your life. But when He comes again visibly He will gather those that are His. And thus, of course, we find the reason for this principle, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God," because in that day He will be manifest in His glory. Occasionally I've been where I've heard people in the exuberance of their praying say, "Oh, God reveal Thyself in the fullness of Thy glory in this prayer meeting tonight." And invariably when I hear that I have to pause for a moment and say, "Oh Lord, please don't; they don't know what they're asking, don't, don't do it." Because as it was said of Moses, "no man can see God as He is in His essence and live" (Exo. 33:20). But, God is light; and our bodies have extremely low tolerance for light. There are six men in England now that are stone blind because during an eclipse of the sun some eight years ago they looked at the sun long enough to completely destroy the optic nerve. If God were to be manifest even though He is here, if He were to manifest in His glory here now in the measure in which He is manifest in heaven, because we are flesh and blood, we would be disintegrated by the revelation. And so for that reason, because of the very nature of God and because of the nature of our bodies, because of our low tolerance for light and for heat, for cold, for air, and oxygen, God is going to give us bodies which are adapted to that glorious environment of His presence and to Himself so that we can see Him. If God were to take you to heaven in the body you now inhabit, my dear, He would have to make a sub-basement for you somewhere to protect you from Himself, because the very glory of what He is would be such as to destroy you. Now, one day we are going to have bodies which are capable of enjoying His presence without restriction and we will see Him as He is as the angels behold Him and the revelation will be such that we will not be destroyed by it. As the falcon swims through the sky but not through the water or under it and as the fish can swim in the water and not through the sky and man is able to do either with great difficulty and under duress and with certain precautions, so one day we'll have bodies which will be at home anywhere in any environment and perfect like His own.

Now, let us notice in conclusion that the kingdom of God is inherited. It belongs to the children of God only. By nature you were a child of wrath. By nature you were under the sentence of death. By nature you were to be excluded in an environment of total darkness; but by the grace of God He has provided salvation. Through the Lord Jesus Christ, He has provided redemption. "The great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity" (Tit. 2:13-14). We are to be redeemed from sin's penalty by His shed blood. We are to be redeemed from sin's power by His presence. And, we are to be redeemed from sin's presence by His coming to give us bodies like unto His own.

Are you a child of God? Unless you have been born again by the gracious, supernatural operation of the Spirit of God, you are living in far greater danger because of the coming of Jesus Christ from the clouds to gather His own than you are by any coming of an atomic warhead from Russia. There's infinitely greater reason for you to prepare to meet God because of the imminence of His coming than for you to put a defense cell in your basement which will protect you from the fallout, should there be an atomic explosion. "For the Son of man shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go *into heaven*" (Act. 1:11). And when He comes then He shall draw to Himself those who are His, those that have been born of His Spirit. Unless you have been born again you are a child of this world, a child of earth, a child of death, a child of sin, a child of Satan. Today He calls you that may not know Him to come to Him and through faith in His shed blood to receive the gift of eternal life. Yea, more than calling

you to come to Him He has come to you; and the testimony of His Word is that He stands just outside your heart's door and knocks, even by my speaking knocks, to enter into your heart. If you will open the door widely to receive Him as Lord and as Savior He will come in and bring with Him eternal life and the certainty that in that day when you see Him you'll be like Him. There's an old cemetery in Philadelphia, at Fifth and Arch Streets, if you were to pass by today you could look through the iron railing and see there the grave of one of America's greatest men, one of the world's most versatile geniuses. If, however, you enter, you will find that on the stone over Benjamin Franklin's grave there is no epitaph. He composed one while he was still under the influence of George Whitefield and before he finally rejected that influence. While he was considering becoming a Christian, he wrote this epitaph, "Like the cover of an old book, Its contents torn out, And stripped of its lettering and gilding, Lies here food for worms; But the work shall not be lost, For it will (as he believes) appear once more, In a new and elegant edition, Revised and corrected by the Author."

I think Job said it better, "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25-26).

In certain respects, the greatest article of the Apostle's Creed is the last, "I believe in the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting." Without that article, all the other affirmations would be meaningless. Suppose one were to say, "I believe in God the Father, but not in life everlasting," or, "I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord, but not in the resurrection of the body," or, "I believe in the Holy Ghost, but not in the resurrection of the body, and in life everlasting." All those statements would be meaningless without the central truth of Christianity expressed in the final essence of the Creed, "I believe in the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting."

"Christ is risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept" (I Cor. 15:20). Upon the empty grave of Christ, the eternal Son of God who died for our sins and rose again for our justification, we build the structure of our faith and our hope; and we defy death with all of its sting and the grave with all of its victory to shake or to overthrow that hope. Do you know Him? Has Christ come into your life? Can you say that because He lives I live also? Would God that it could be true of every heart here today.

Shall we bow in prayer. Our Father in Heaven we thank and praise Thee that we believe in the resurrection of the body and in life everlasting. Though after our skin the worms destroy this flesh yet we shall stand before Thee and see Thee face to face. How we thank Thee, how we praise Thee and worship Thee and adore Thee for so great a hope. But our heart goes out to Thee today for those that may have come among us who do not share this hope and confidence and certainty. We pray for them. May the Holy Spirit Himself seal the truth and may there be a many a heart door open even this morning to invite the Lord Jesus Christ in to reign and to rule and to save and redeem. This He came to do, this He waits to do. Oh may it be done for His praise today, Amen.

Shall we stand for the benediction.

Now may the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep. Through the blood of the everlasting covenant make us perfect in every good work to do His will working in us that which is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ our Lord to whom be the glory now and forever, Amen.

* Reference such as: Delivered at the Gospel Tabernacle, New York City, NY on Sunday Morning, July 17, 1960 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.