



REDEMPTION
CHURCH

The Man of Heaven

1 Corinthians 15:42–49 - Sunday, April 9, 2023 (Easter)

Everything changed on that Easter Sunday. After Jesus died on the cross on Friday, he was placed in the tomb. Jesus' followers collapsed into devastated despair, but everything changed when the stone of the tomb rolled away, and the victorious Jesus walked resurrected out of the tomb! The resurrection of Jesus changed everything for the disciples. They spoke to the resurrected Christ. They touched his hands and feet. They ate fish with him by the fire. Jesus was not a figment of their imagination, but he truly—flesh and bone—rose from the grave! And as the resurrection transformed the lives of the first Christians, the preaching of the gospel spread to the ends of the earth. The resurrection of Jesus has changed the world. And the resurrection of Jesus can change your life too.

Most of us are fairly change-averse. We like things to stay the same. We grow comfortable in our predictable routines. When someone or something intrudes upon our established patterns, we get frustrated by the annoyance. But the resurrection of Jesus is a bullhorn to your quiet routine. The news of Easter interrupts your life. Jesus announces his kingship and heralds it through his preachers. And make no mistake, the invitation of the gospel is one of radical change—spectacular, glorious, and holy change. If you will turn from your sin and put your faith in the risen Jesus, your life will be changed.

No longer condemned, you will be justified.

No longer at enmity with God, you will be at peace.

No longer alone, you will be adopted.

No longer anxious, you will be at rest.

No longer a slave to sin, you will be set free.

No longer confined to spiritual death, you will have eternal life.

No longer entrapped by the withering flesh wasting away at your bones, but guaranteed a new resurrected body!

What glorious changes! Even the most change-averse person in this room can't help but find your heart long for the wondrous ways the gospel changes our lives! And it is to this last change, the change to our bodies, that I want to focus our attention on this Easter Sunday by turning our attention to 1 Corinthians 15. Because Christ has resurrected, everyone who unites in faith to Jesus will have their natural body changed into a resurrected body.

1 Corinthians 15 is Paul's great chapter on the resurrection. We are going to focus our attention on a paragraph in verses 42–49 right in the middle of this glorious but intricate chapter. But Paul's argument is so connected in 1 Corinthians 15, it's difficult to study any verse of this chapter without understanding the scope of the whole. So before we focus on verses 42–49, I want to zoom out and overview Paul's teaching on the resurrection.

As Paul opens the chapter, he urges the Corinthians to hold fast to the word he preached to them. The message of the Gospel that Paul declared to the Corinthians was of first importance. In verse 3, we get a wonderful summary of the gospel message: "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." Paul goes on to describe how the resurrected Christ appeared to Peter and the rest of the twelve disciples. In addition, in a single gathering, the resurrected Jesus appeared before 500 brothers. Last of all, he appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus and called him to be an apostle. Paul stresses that the resurrection of Christ from the grave is not a myth. It is not a legend. But it is a historical reality, verifiable by the empty tomb and hundreds of witnesses. Because of the significance of this supernatural and historical event, the resurrection of Jesus is not a footnote to the gospel nor just an addendum to it. Rather, it is of first importance.

The doctrine of the resurrection was a truth that the Corinthian Christians began to doubt. Paul raises the concerning question he heard the church asking in verse 12: "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" Such a question casts aside the entire Christian gospel. If there will be no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised! And if Christ is not raised, Paul says, "Our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain." The resurrection is the proof of Christian preaching, the assurance that our sins were truly paid for on the cross, and the promise of the hope we have in the life to come.

Paul then explains how Christ's resurrection guarantees the resurrection of believers. Jesus' resurrection is the first fruit of a coming resurrection of the dead at the end of the age. Paul explains them by contrasting Jesus with Adam (a point we will see him make extensively in our passage of focus this morning). Verse 22 is key: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." So those who belong to Christ will share in Christ's resurrection at his second coming. At that point, our enemy's death will be destroyed done and for all.

But verse 35 raises new questions that the Corinthians were asking, not just *whether* the resurrection would happen, but if so *how* it would happen. Paul leans on natural imagery from creation to explain the transformation that will come at the resurrection. He leans into the imagery of sowing a seed. As a seed is sown, the seed “dies” in order to become a plant. For the plant to emerge, the form of the seed has to pass away for the plant to be raised.

And that sets us up nicely to understand how Paul further develops this argument starting in verse 42. For those who are in Christ, we will notice three changes that the gospel brings because of Christ’s resurrection: (1) a change of body, (2) a change of head, meaning our leader and representative, and (3) a change of our image.

1. Change of Body: From the Natural Body to the Spiritual Body (v. 42-44)

Ready to explain his analogy of the seeds changing into a plant, Paul tells us that the resurrection of the dead works similarly—“so it is with the resurrection of the dead.” And here is a principle that Paul lays forth for us—death precedes resurrection. Just as a seed dies to give birth to the plant, so must our natural bodies die, changing into our resurrected bodies.

Paul highlights the contrast between the natural body and the spiritual body in a series of contrasting descriptions. By the *natural* body, Paul refers to our current flesh that will waste away and die. By the *spiritual* body, Paul refers to the resurrected bodies to come. Don’t confuse the word spiritual for immaterial. As Paul uses the term, the spiritual body is not a floating spirit but resurrected flesh and blood.

But because of the resurrection of Christ, those who are in Christ will be changed from the natural body to the spiritual body. Paul gives a series of contrasting descriptions of the natural body versus the spiritual body to highlight the change. The natural body is perishable, dishonorable, and weak. In contrast, the spiritual body is imperishable, glorious, and powerful. Let’s walk through those contrasts to understand them better.

The natural body is perishable. The original word means decomposition. As we age, we know exactly what Paul means. Aging is but the process of our flesh rotting away. Our vision deteriorates. Our joints and ligaments ache in pain. Our skin wrinkles. Our backs ache. Our hearing deafens. As soon as we are born, our bodies burst forth in rapid growth and the strength of youth—but how fleeting youth is! As soon as we hit our physical prime, we begin decades of slow, gradual, but unrelenting decay. But the spiritual body is imperishable. It does not break down. The spiritual body is immortal, lasting forever, and incorruptible!

The natural body is dishonorable. Paul says our natural body is “sown in dishonor.” Dishonor is being used here in terms of the physical vitality of the body. Compared to the fleeting strength of

youth, our bodies become dishonorable over time. We don't look vigorous and healthy. Our posture slumps. Our steps become slower. Our voice becomes thin. And if you've ever watched an elderly person waste away on their death bed, you know what Paul means by sown in dishonor. Our dishonorable bodies are reliant on others—to feed us, nurse us, and even move us. Aging takes the glory of youth and disgraces the body. Aging withers our honor away and shames our bodies. But as we are “sown in dishonor” in the natural body, we will be “raised in glory” with the spiritual body.

The natural body is “sown in weakness.” Even the strength of a man at his prime is astonishingly fragile. One car crash. One heart attack. One accident. And over the course of our life, our strength fails us. Age might bring increased wisdom, but what we exchange for wisdom is our youthful strength. Fleshly weakness awaits us all. But as the natural body is sown in weakness into death, it is raised in power! You, at your healthiest, at your fittest, at your strongest in this life, will be but dishonor compared to the glorious spiritual body that awaits us!

Oh, how perishable, how dishonorable, how weak are our natural bodies! And oh, how imperishable, how glorious, how powerful will be our spiritual bodies! What a remarkable change that we will experience as we pass into death and rise again on the day of resurrection! The natural body, like a seed sown into the dirt, will sprout into the spiritual body of eternal life!

But the question still remains, what enables this change? What causes the transformation of our bodies? By what power will our resurrection come to pass? Paul expands the dichotomy between the natural and spiritual body by showing us that this dichotomy is a result of a change of headship. Our eternal future is determined by whose origin and authority we live, the first Adam or the last Adam.

2. Change of Head: From the First Adam to the Last Adam (vv. 45–46)

In the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, Jesus forms a new humanity. The significance of this shift cannot be overstated. But to understand the new humanity under Christ, we must understand the old humanity under Adam.

Paul quotes Genesis 2:7 in referring to the first Adam, who “became a living being.” In the Genesis account, the creation of man in God's own image is the climax of God's creative work. Adam is the federal head of all human beings. The headship of Adam means that he is both our biological origin as the first man and also our representative. Thus, we inherit Adam's sinful nature and guilt. And as Adam dies, so do we all die. We know from Genesis that God created Adam to be a living being, but by Adam's fall into sin, we all inherit his sinful nature and join him in our deserved deaths. “In Adam all die” (v. 22). Paul writes in Romans, “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rm 5:12).

We may not like the Bible's description of our hearts, but we must confront the truth. We are the spitting image of our father, Adam. Even though we inherited his sinful nature and guilt, we follow in his rebellious footsteps. We reject God's Word. We go our own way. We sin. We do what we want, scorning the commands of our creator God. We refuse to worship the Lord and instead turn to worship created things. Instead of living for God's glory, we prefer to live for our own. Like Adam, God made us living beings. And from Adam we receive our natural bodies. But by our sin, we have brought condemnation to our souls and corruption to God's good world. We are living creatures who are under the condemnation of death!

But in contrast, Jesus is presented as the last Adam. Jesus marks the conclusion of one sort of humanity and the beginning of a new humanity. Born in the likeness of sinful flesh, Jesus condemned sin in the flesh (Rom 8:3). Thus, Jesus becomes a new head, a new Adam, for a brand new humanity. And while Adam received the breath of life, becoming a living creature, Jesus, as the last Adam, "became a life-giving spirit." Notice the difference: Adam received his life from the breath of God, but Jesus breathed out life to others. Under the old humanity, we inherit the natural body along with Adam's guilt. But by faith in Christ, we can exit the old humanity and enter into the new. In the old humanity of Adam, we are sinful, wicked, condemned, and dying. But in the new humanity of Jesus, we are righteous, holy, justified, and living. Instead of the natural body of Adam, the body of the new humanity of Christ is the spiritual body of resurrection.

Jesus is the life giver! He gives life to dead sinners under Adam. As the Word of his gospel goes into our hearts, it sprouts spiritual life in our dead hearts. We respond to the gospel with repentance and faith! And Jesus gives His Spirit to us, pouring himself into our hearts. And over the course of our Christian lives, the Holy Spirit is at work within moving us out of our old humanity and transforming us into the new humanity. The Spirit of God animates us, renews us, restores us, and begins to transform us. By the indwelling Holy Spirit, God inwardly sanctifies us into the new humanity of Jesus while the old humanity of the natural body wastes away. This is what Paul means when he later writes to the Corinthians: "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor 4:16). The natural body wastes away while the inner being is being transformed into the new humanity of Jesus. The last step in our sanctification is the glorification of our bodies.

But just as there is an order in agriculture—the seed dies, then sprouts life—so too with the change of resurrection. Look at verse 46: "But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual." Paul stresses that the passing of the natural body in death must precede the raising of the spiritual body in the resurrection. In Adam, we must die to be raised by the life-giving and resurrected Jesus.

So Christian, don't be dismayed when your body deteriorates. Do not be surprised at death. Remember the order God has prescribed—physical death precedes eternal life. The death of our natural bodies must happen first before we inherit our spiritual bodies from Jesus. In the gospel, death is not the termination of life but the transformation of the body. As we bury the corpses of our Christian brothers and sisters into the ground, we communicate our hope of resurrection. This is one of the reasons why Christians bury their dead, and why I think it ought to be our preferred

practice as believers. The body is planted in the grave like a seed, expecting in the hope that from that grave, at Christ's return, the imperishable spiritual body will sprout from that perishable seed. Now at the resurrection, the Lord Jesus can and will certainly raise the bodies of his saints from the ashes of cremation—but the burial of the Christian visually communicates our hope in the resurrection.

The most sobering part of preaching funerals is the graveside service. While in the funeral home, the funeral service can stay a glib memorial recalling the memories of the deceased, but the mood changes when you step out of the car onto that cemetery grass. When we stand in front of a casket hovering over a hole in the ground surrounded by hundreds of graves, no one can escape without confronting the horrible reality of death. In those final moments, we feel the sharp sting of death.

There at the grave, we confront our greatest foe. And as we lower that perishable, dishonorable, weak natural body in the ground, the Christian does so in faith, hoping in the gospel promises that this natural body will be raised into an imperishable, glorious, and powerful spiritual body! And through our tears, we do so confidently, knowing that suffering precedes glory. The old humanity must pass to make way for the new. Death precedes life. The end of the natural body precedes the rising of the resurrected body. And as our corpses return to the dust, we trust that the last Adam will raise the withered dust of dead flesh!

3. Change of Image: From the Image of Dust to the Image of the Man of Heaven (vv. 47–49)

And on that glorious day of resurrection, we will be changed by the resurrected Christ! The first man, Adam, was made from the dust of the earth. But Jesus is the man of heaven. Verse 47: "The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven." Adam was a man of dust, and so too are all his children—from "ashes to ashes, dust to dust." God fashioned humanity from the soil of the earth, and it is to the soil we return.

We follow the pattern of the man of dust. In the fallenness of our sin, we die and decay. We return to the place of Adam's origin—dust. But for those who placed themselves under the "second man" from heaven, we will go to *his* place of origin.

Jesus is uniquely the son of Adam *and* the Son of God. Jesus is truly human—born of the virgin Mary, cloaked in the weakness of our flesh, and human in every way we are. And yet, Jesus is the Son of God, the eternal, holy, all-powerful God who comes to us from heaven and enfleshes himself in our humanity as the man Jesus Christ!

And through the life of Christ, Jesus never sinned. He perfectly obeyed in righteousness. While we all disobey in Adam, Jesus the new Adam obeys. Jesus is ineffable in glory, splendid in his

holiness, unsullied by the corruption of sin, impeccable in his faithfulness, and unstained in his righteousness.

And this righteous man from heaven goes to the cross to take on our curse. Jesus bore the consequences of our sins by taking our death on his shoulders. On Christ, the Lord Jesus bore the wrath of God for our sin. Though he was the man from heaven—undeserving of Adam’s curse, he descended to the dead to rescue sinners from the grave and bestow upon his people resurrected life!

Friend, your death is coming. Your natural body is breaking down. Have you ever asked what will come when you die? How much time do you think you have left? You aren’t promised tomorrow, even if you are in the best of health. What future awaits you after you die? Will you share in the resurrection of Christ? Or will your death plunge you into a hopeless abyss, a cavern of eternal death?

The way to escape the judgment of death is to unite ourselves to Jesus by repentance and faith. By repentance, we turn away from our sin. We recognize that our disobedience and sin have only brought us God’s judgment. We forsake the wickedness of our father Adam, repent of our disobedience, and forsake the old humanity for the new. We put our faith in Jesus, believing that he is the Son of God, trusting in the salvation he provides through his death, burial, and resurrection. And the wonderful promise of this good news is that when we forsake the image of the man of dust, by God’s salvation, we will bear the image of the man of heaven.

Paul writes in verse 48: “As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.”

The fallen, corrupted image of God inflicted on Adam’s children will be redeemed, renewed, and restored into the image of the man of heaven. And because of Jesus’ resurrection from the grave, we will be changed and transformed into the image of Christ. As the Holy Spirit works in the life of the Christian, he conforms us to the pattern of Christ, sanctifying us. And unless the Lord comes back in our lifetimes, our flesh will decay away. Our bodies will be placed in the grave. And take heart, the perishable will inherit the perishable!

“I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:50–57, ESV)

Oh, hear this glorious news on this easter morning! Christ is risen! The man from heaven has come! He has come to rescue us out of our perishable flesh. But as the seed of our natural flesh is planted into the ground, Christ will summon us forth on that last day. We all will be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and from the dust of our graves will sprout a spiritual body, a resurrected body, a body like that of our Lord Jesus Christ! And on the great day of resurrection, the saints will rejoice that the last enemy, death itself, has been defeated once and for all! Death will be swallowed up in the victory of Christ! And the resurrected saints will mock death crying out, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting!” Because Christ is victorious over the grave, the sting of death is removed because the power of sin is demolished by the sin-atoning death of Jesus and his triumphant resurrection!

Oh, hear me, may our lives be changed by this glorious news. May this gospel change *everything* about how we live and who we live for!

To you who are condemned in your sin, see how Jesus has died for you, bearing your condemnation. Though innocent, he took on your guilt. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). The resurrection of Jesus means that your sin can be paid for, your condemnation removed. The cross was effective, and Jesus accomplished his mission. Atonement and forgiveness are available—come to the resurrected Christ!

To you who are sick, see how Jesus gives hope in your sickness. Whether you suffer the ordinary decay of age, an infestation of cancer, a heart teetering on the edge of stopping, or a brain losing its function, your natural body is wasting away. Even now, in your bones, you know the seed of your natural body is being planted. Listen carefully, if you are in Christ, your sickness will not be the end of you, even if it takes you to the grave. By the power of the resurrected Christ, the natural body will give way to the spiritual body. Jesus is risen—a new body is coming—rejoice in the resurrected Christ!

To you who are suffering, feeling the pain of this fallen world—with all its abuses and corruptions and heartaches and sorrows. To you who are burdened with a heavy heart, fallen into despair, on the edge of collapse from the exhaustion of yet another unrelenting sorrow. The man of heaven has unleashed a new humanity and, thus a new creation. All the anguish of this cursed world will be redeemed under the rule of the man from heaven. Though we weep for the night, joy will come in the morning. And though your sufferings seem unending now, though they feel to you an eternal night, the morning dawn will soon rise! Because of Christ’s resurrection, your sufferings are but light and momentary compared to the glory that will be revealed. Cling to the resurrected Christ!

To the grieving who have had to stand over an onslaught of unending graves, remember the resurrection of Christ. To you who have watched parents, and siblings, and friends, and children lowered into the ground, the sting of death that now throbs in your soul will soon be swallowed up in the victory of Christ’s resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is the death blow to death.

Death's defeat is certain because Christ is risen! And so, in the moments of quiet grief, fill your heart with thankfulness to God. Be thankful for the resurrected Christ!

To those exhausted from following Christ, who are exhausted in their ministry, empty from pouring out their lives to others, tired in their fight against sin, and fearful as you minister the gospel to those around you, rejoice that as you pick up your cross to follow Jesus, as you die to yourself each day, as your life lofts with the fragrance of death, remember that you are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing (2 Cor 2:15). The resurrection of Jesus means that you do not labor in vain, and that as you are "united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom 6:5). And so take risks for Jesus. Lay down your life for Jesus. Go to the most dangerous places in the furthest part of the world. Go wherever the Lord Jesus calls you because only those who know the resurrected Christ can have bold confidence to lay down their lives for his kingdom, even in the face of certain death. Be filled with courage, for though we are slayed all the day long, we are more than conquerors. Not even death will separate you from the love of God. Because as your natural body is slayed in service to Christ, you will be raised in the imperishable flesh of the resurrected body! All because Jesus lives! Be courageous in the resurrected Christ!

Our hope, our confidence, our future is all tied to the one reality we have gathered to celebrate this easter morning. Christ is risen. Everything has changed. Bow your knees and worship him!