VCBC SLG Fall Term 2023
The Book of I Corinthians
Lesson #12
The Concluding Reminder—Bodily Resurrection of the Saints (II0)
Chapter 15 (b) & Chapter 16

Introduction

Having clarified the importance of Christ's and our bodily resurrection both in the gospel message itself, especially with death as the "final enemy" ushering to the ultimate and complete reign of Christ and God, so that God may be "All in All", Paul now describes to us how and when this final and ultimate victory of Christ is going to happen.

But first, he would address the challenge by some (likely within the church in Corinth) who doubt such a bodily resurrection since our bodies are not only dead but would have decayed.

15: 35-39 Isn't it how nature works?

"But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?' 36 How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37 When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. 38 But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. 39 Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another.

For Paul to call them fools, those who raise such an objection would more than likely do so out of disbelief in the Word of God.

In any case, Paul seeks to answer them based on common sense of how nature works:

1. Using plants as an example, Paul asks which comes first:
    - The seed or the (body of the) plant?
    - The obvious answer is the seed comes first.
2. Then he asks what must happen to the seed in order to produce the (body of the) plant?
    - The answer if: the seed must die first!

Then Paul turns our attention to the fact that:

3. Different seeds produce different kinds of body, just as the Creator God has determined, and
4. He applies the same truth to flesh. i.e.
    - Animals, birds and fish
    - God has given each a different kind of body as He has determined.

That's how God works in nature.

15: 40-41 Same applies to "celestial" bodies

"There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and (the splendor) of the earthly bodies is another. 41 The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor."

Now, Paul extends his observation to the heavenly bodies: we should take note that "heavenly" refers to the physical celestial realm, not the spiritual heavenly realm:

- Note that "glory" is always associated with the light or brightness of the object, as in Luke 2:9: "An angel of the Lord appeared to them (the shepherds), and the glory of the Lord shone around them."
- So, when Paul contrasts the earthly bodies (of the animals, birds and fish) with the celestial bodies (the sun, moon and stars)
    - There, too, have different kind of bodies, but
    - Paul also points out the differences in their kind of "splendor" which is the word for "glory"
    - However, the basic meaning used by Paul is that of "radiance" that emits out of each of the matters, whether by reflection or not is not the point here. The point is that each is different.

15: 42-44 Same applies to our "resurrected" bodies

"So (also) will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. "

Applying the above God-designed principles in nature to the bodies of the believing dead, Paul now compares or contrast the seed (of the earthly body) to the resurrected body:

The Seed Sown	The Raised Body
Perishable	Imperishable
Dishonor	Glory
Weakness	Power
Natural body	Spiritual body

Since, the natural body, for all intents and purposes, is the "seed", the "spiritual body" is a "logical" outcome—to be expected, but as huge a contrast between the transformation from a natural see to a natural body, that of our earthly body (seed) to the "spiritual body" is one of glory and power, made possible by the death and resurrection of the "heavenly man".

15: 45-51 We now, bear image of the "Heavenly Man"

"So (also) it is written: 'The first man Adam became a living soul'; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. 46 The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. 47 The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. 48 As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. 49 And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image

of the heavenly man. 50 I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable."

The "so also" continues the previous trend of argument of seed preceding body, but Paul now emphasizes on the power and glory of the Christ as the 2nd Adam over the 1st Adam:

1st Adam (earthly man)	2dn Adam—Christ (heavenly man)
A living soul (Gen. 2:7)	A life-giving Spirit
Comes 1st (the natural)	Comes after (the spiritual)
Dust of the earth (out of earth)	Out of heaven
Same with all (born) after Adam	Same with all (born) of heaven
We (used to) bear Adam's image	We (now) bear image of the heavenly

The conclusion: If we remain as before, as seed in our "flesh and blood" which is perishable, we cannot inherit the kingdom of God which is imperishable, meaning we need to transform from "seed", this earthly body, into the "spiritual body" which is imperishable!

The question remains: how and when?

15: 51-57 The Ultimate "Mystery"

"Listen (or rather, Behold) I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." 55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

This is one of the most exhilarating passages in all Scriptures, as Paul reveals to us whoa and when the final victory over death which has enslaved all mankind since the Fall of Adam.

The word, "behold" certainly carries a sense of excitement, but also it assures us of its certainty, as if we could actually see its happening! And the facts that we could see (with our eye of faith, but guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ) include:

- **We will not all sleep** (as in dying in Christ): in 1 Thessalonians 4, which is likely written a bit earlier than this current epistle, Paul shares with us the sequence of believers' resurrection in that: "**According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.**" (I Thess. 4:15)—meaning when Christ comes again, some of us would have fallen asleep, but chances are, some of us might not have died yet:

- **But we will all be changed (or exchanged):** referring to our "natural" body being "raised" from "perishable" to "imperishable", "clothed" from "mortal with immortality"
    - The word "clothed" perhaps best understood not literally but as in its connotation of "appearance" or "likeness" of Christ as v.49 alludes to.
- When: **in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.** This, again, is echoes by I Thessalonians 4: "**For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever**." (I Thess. 4: 16-17)
    - We all agree that Paul explicitly assures us that this will happen at Christ's return, but we are not totally sure:
        - While the change from perishable to imperishable happens "in a flesh, in the twinkling of an eye", at which point of His return will it happen?
        - Does the last trumpet refer to the last of the seven trumpets of Revelation (11:15)? And
        - Even if this is the "last trumpet", this, according to Revelation, opens up to a series of other "final" events which lead to the final showdown with Satan whose defeat and being thrown into "the lake of burning sulfur" (Rev. 20:10) is accompanied by "death and Hades" (Rev. 20:14)

While the Scriptures really have not provided us with further details in the sequence of such events, I would rathe not speculate, except to believe with certainty of this final victory of death by the Lord upon His return.

The Final Victory over this "last enemy" of Christ is highlighted by the following quotes from the Old Testament:

"then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." 55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

- The 1st quote is from Isaiah 25:8 when prophet prophesizes about the End-time when God will defeat all the nations and remove the disgrace from His people as "**He will swallow up death forever**" .
- The 2nd quote is bit lengthier and is from Hosea 13:14 when the prophet rebukes Ephraim (i.e. Israel) of all their sins and foretells their suffering and even death. But this rebuke ends with an amazing turn of event and promise: "**I will deliver this people from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?"**

At once, we can see that Paul purposely "paraphrases" the words from Hosea, substituting "plagues/penalties" with "victory" and "destruction" with "sting"—in both cases, the words are similar in meaning, but with a more forceful punch, if you like.

The prophet Hosea has a two-fold message to the rebellious Israelites that is echoed or made plain in the New Testament. First is that their wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23); but

- " However, almost like in the same breath (at least within the same message), the Lord is quick to add that the power of the grave will not have the last say for God's people, because He will deliver them from death, and the method is through the payment of a ransom (which is the meaning of redemption). With this, the Lord Himself explodes into a song of victory: "Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?" (13:14). But little would these people bent on rebellion, on worshipping Baal instead of God, and on rejecting the Lord as their king know that God's ultimate redemption is through the sacrifice of His own Son as the ransom for their sins!" (5-Year Devotion)

No wonder, the Apostle Paul echoes God's song of victory when he thinks of the day of resurrection and shouts, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

Indeed, our sin has been exposed by the perfect Law of God which (like a trap of circle) has "bound" us up as "disobedience" (Romans 11:32)—in this sense, the Law become the power of sin that condemns us, link a sting (or poisonous goad) that sends us to certain death!

But, Christ, through His death has freed us form the power of the Law as He has taken up the penalty (or plagues) of death and through His resurrection "swallows" up death, not just His own bodily death, but ours. Our resurrection, therefore, is the final and complete victory over death and its sting (sin—that poisonous goad that sends us to our almost inevitable destiny)!

What a glorious hope we have in Christ Jesus!

15: 58 Final Exhortation to "Stand firm"

"**Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain**."

With this glorious hope in Christ, Paul gives the Corinthians one final exhortation and that is to urge them to "Stand firm". The logical question we have is: why ask them to stand firm? What might be there to make them "waver"?

This exhortation is likely a concluding, summary admonishment that harkens back to the reasons why Paul chooses to write to them in the first place, and that will include:

- Pride in human knowledge that empties the power of the message of the Cross
- Elevation of one leader or another that divides the church
- The giving in to and compromise with immorality
- The resorting to secular court to settle brotherly conflicts
- The misuse of freedom in Christ causing the weaker ones to fall

- The abuse of gifts, of equality in Christ and disrespect of the Lord's Table that have caused much chaos and disruption of orderliness in worship and
- Living and serving the body of Christ void of Agape love!

Paul urges, basically to be like him, to give fully and singularly to the work of the Lord doing everything for the sake of the gospel to "sav some" (9: 21-22)

- And he assures them that "**your labor in the Lord is not in vain** (or empty)."

Chapter 16
Housekeeping and Final Word

16: 1-4 Concerning the Collection for the Poor Saints

"Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. [2] On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. [3] Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. [4] If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me."

The words "Now about" used by Paul in this letter almost act like a formula to denote things that the Corinthians wrote to him in their letter(see 7:1).

The thing that was likely mentioned in their letter is about collection of money for the "saints". From other passages in the New Testaments, it is more than likely that the collection is for the poor saints in Jerusalem (Acts 24:17; Rom. 15:26;). Why does Paul so keen in collecting donations for the Jerusalem church?

- There were famines from time to time in Jerusalem (Acts 11:28-30);
- The church in Jerusalem bears the brunt of Jewish persecution, but the time of Paul's writing, "sharing things in common" might have ceased to be a practice; and
- Given Jerusalem being the main source of opposition to Paul by the "Judaizers", Paul might want to gain their acceptance through visible acts of love.

Other things of note include:

- It is the first record of Christians meeting on the 1st day of the week as a church which obviously has to be with the day of the week our Lord is risen;
- It shows that our offering to the Lord, whether for the poor saints or so-called regular tithings should be set aside before, i.e. ready before we go to church, and
- Should be done in proportion to our income.
- Also, it is obvious that Paul tries to avoid the handling of finance which is an example to all God's servants, and

- Those who handle finance of the church should have a good reputation, endorsable by people of the church.

16: 5-12 Concerning Paul's Possible Trip to Them

"5 After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you—for I will be going through Macedonia. 6 Perhaps I will stay with you for a while, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. 7 For I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. 8 But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, 9 because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.
10 When Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. 11 No one, then, should treat him with contempt. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers.
12 Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity."

Because, previously, Paul mentioned about some of them doubted his sincerity of coming to visit the church, (4:18), so Paul assures them here that his visit to them is not an "if", but "when". Incidentally, we are being made aware of the following:

- Paul is writing from Ephesus and intends to stay put in Ephesus for a while;
- The reason is because there is "**a great door for effective work has opened"** to him
- But with such an open door, there are oppositions
    - Which reminds us that labor for the Lord is always a spiritual battle, and open doors do not necessarily mean smooth sailing, and perhaps, just the opposite!
- However, Paul also expresses his desire to make a longer visit to them
    - Which is not an excuse for not going right away, and he indicates his desire to go after Pentecost (50 days after Easter) but will travel through Macedonia.
    - So, given the land and sea combined journey, Paul would likely arrive there in the beginning of Fall and thus likely spend the winter there.
    - However, Paul knows that it is ultimately up to the Lord, as he has misread the will of the Lord previously and had to be stopped twice by the Lord (Acts 16: 6ff).

Paul then mentions two of his own colleagues:

1. Timothy:
   In 4:17, Paul explicitly says that he has sent Timothy them. It is likely that Timothy has yet to arrive, but due to the hostility that some of them have towards him, he is afraid that they would extend the same to Timothy—his student and with Timothy's likely younger age, Paul wants to makes sure that the Corinthian Church would respect him and would not treat him with contempt.
   Paul emphasizes that Timothy, irrespective of his age and relationship with Paul, is nonetheless, "**carrying on the work of Lord**", and thus should command respect.

2. Apollos: the words about Apollos are self-explanatory and they show that Paul and Apollos are in good terms, not competing with one another as the Corinthians might have rumored them to be.

16: 13-18 Concerning Paul's Possible Trip to Them

"13 Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. 14 Do everything in love. 15 You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people. I urge you, brothers, 16 to submit to such people and to everyone who joins in the work and labors at it. 17 I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. 18 For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition."

I would have thought the concluding words after the great treatise on Resurrection would have been the last words of exhortation to them. However, as Paul mentions about Timothy, Apollos and now Stephanas, he feels obliged to further urge them to "**do everything in love,**" apart from being **on guard** (i.e. by on the alert), **stand firm in the faith and be courageous and be strong**"—attitudes that are much needed given "time is short" and increased persecutions await them. (7: 25ff)

This special mention of Stephanas appears to be needed because:

- He is a leader in the church in Corinth who and his household obviously have been defending Paul all along;
- Being the first converts, they did suffer much (in fact, being beaten according to Acts 18:17) and likely have transitioned from being a synagogue ruler to a leader of the church in Corinth;
- With such a background and their devotion to the Lord and His work, Paul commands the church to submit to their leadership.
- Paul also commends them as having supplied his need (while the Corinthians have not) and been an encouragement to Paul (especially given the hardship and suffering Paul has endured)—thus they deserve their recognition.

We do not know who Fortunatus and Achaicus are, except that they must have accompanied Stephanas in his visit to Paul in Ephesus. Some opine that they are part of Stephanas' household.

16: 19-24 Final Greetings

"19 The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house. 20 All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.
21 I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. 22 If anyone does not love the Lord, let that person be cursed! Come, Lord!
23 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. 24 My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen."

The final greetings include greetings from Aquila and Prisilla most naturally, because they were former Corinthians. In fact, as fellow tentmakers, Paul met them first at Corinth (Acts 18:1-3). It is clear from the greetings that the couple are still in Ephesus where they have discipled Apollos

(Acts 18:26) and eventually the church in Ephesus gives him recommendations to go and help the church in Corinth. (Acts 18:27)

It is interesting to note in the final greetings three particular things:

a. Paul chooses to write at this time in his own handwriting;
   - Meaning the letter has been dictated until now, and Paul feels obliged to write in his own handwriting, likely to authenticate this letter as his, silencing any doubters in the church.

b. He ends this letter with a curse which is quite unusual. I agree with Fee's comment that: "With pen in hand, immediately following his signature, Paul apparently feels impelled to take on last shot at his Corinthian opponents, in the form of a curse. '**If anyone does not love the Lord, let that person be cursed.'**
   - As serious and perhaps bitter as these words are, Paul is simply baring his soul to the Corinthians in urging them to stop the bickering and all that they have been doing in "destroying" the temple of the Holy Spirit which is the church, and thus he is simply echoing his earlier words of warning that, "**If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple**." (3:17)

c. Befitting the urgency that he has expressed on the time being short and his sense of the imminent coming of the Lord, he ends with these Aramaic words, "*Marana tha*" the most likely translation is: "Our Lord, Come!"

As broken hearted and hurt as Paul is, his love for them, his flock, the church that he founded with his own life, has never wavered as he ends with these words in this letter, "**My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen."**