

1Corinthians 18-12-30b

We resume our study now in 1 Corinthians chapter 15. And the first thing we have seen in great detail and clarity is that God is in charge of life and death. God, we know from other places, determines the span of our life.

He determined where and when we would be born. The very hairs on our heads are numbered. And we live, we experience, and we die, all in accordance with God's perfect will.

Not only does He appoint the time, the place, and the nature of our first life, but He is also utterly and completely in charge of our resurrection. And Paul points this out by using the analogy in the vegetable kingdom, the plant world, that we experience. We observe that a seed is planted and it's gone for a while, but that doesn't mean that the influence and the existence of what that seed represented is gone.

It comes back in a manifestly greater form. The plant is bigger than the seed. I can't think of any plant whose seed is bigger than the plant itself.

So each receives its own body. All flesh is not the same flesh. I always thought, well, this is going to be a real difficult challenge because scientifically we say muscle is muscle, whether it's a bird or a beast or a fish or whatever.

He says all flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of man, another of animals, another of fish, and another of birds. Well, in categorical terms, is this defensible? Is he using something rough here? And when he says all flesh, not the same flesh, but one flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds. This is the reverse order of creation in Genesis chapter one.

Man was last, right? What was first in Genesis one? Let the air team with flying things, let the waters team and swarm with swimming things, let the land host animals, and then finally on the sixth day God created man. And when it talks about the kind of flesh, God created these at different times in different environments, and he's not so much talking about the intrinsic quality of the flesh as he is the appearance. And you see this in some of the vocabulary.

For example, he says one flesh of men, another flesh of animals. The word for animals here is the word that means that which is owned. These are domesticated animals.

These are your bovines and your goats and sheep and cattle is what's in view in this context. So that's a kind of flesh, and it has a purpose, and it has a relationship to man, right? Man relates to himself. We relate to each other.

Flesh of men, another flesh of animals, those are your domesticated food animals, your herd and flock animals, another of fish. And this speaks not just of the quality of the flesh of the fish, but it is an entirely different realm. Mankind has his civilization.

Domesticated animals have their fields and their pastures and their pens and their whole order of environment. Fish have a completely different realm and order and environment. They are acquired and used by man in a completely different way.

They're in the water instead of on the ground. And birds have a different form. They are equipped to function in the air.

Fish are equipped to function in the sea. Herd animals are equipped to feed themselves off the land to gather calories and condense them so that we can access them in a lot less labor-intensive form. And so it is not just the quality of their body, but their assigned place and function, right? Each of these is manifestly different.

All flesh is not the same flesh. We're not just talking about form. We're talking about function.

We're talking about nature of existence. Then in verse 40, he says, there are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies, but the glory of the celestial is one and the glory of the terrestrial is another. We're tempted to think, well, celestial bodies, that's the resurrection bodies, and terrestrial bodies, that's our current earthly bodies.

But the next verse tells us that he's actually talking about things that exist in the celestial realm and things that exist in the terrestrial. So celestial bodies here, he's talking about what you see in the sky. And terrestrial bodies, he's talking about what you see on the earth.

And he terms them by way of glory. The glory of the celestial is one and that of the terrestrial is another. In these next couple of verses, 40 and 41, you're going to have glory six times in your English, five times in the Greek.

He's talking about the glory. And he's using the physical earth and the physical sky to talk about there are things that are up in that realm. We've talked about the realm of the sea.

We've talked about the realm of the air. We've talked about the realm of the land. We've talked about the difference between animals and humans in terms of what they access.

We have a realm of ideas. We have the esoteric and the ephemeral, the realm of thinking and so on that is different than the animals. Our bodies are governed by a mind that is radically different than the animals.

Animals, domesticated animals versus fish and birds. But there are also things that are up in the sky, these bodies that are up in the sky and there are bodies down on the earth. And the glory of the celestial is one kind.

Glory of the terrestrial is another. How do you gauge glory of celestial bodies? How bright are they? That's pretty much the only tool ancient man had access to. We couldn't do a lot of sophisticated analysis.

You look up in the sky, hey that's bright, that's not so bright, that's dim, that's very dim. There's

probably some of them I can only see part of the time. What happens with a new moon? It's there but I can barely see it.

It's brightness. So the pertinence and the relevance, the importance, the effect of things in the sky depends almost entirely on their brightness. We saw this actually in Psalm 19.

The sun coming out of the tent and running its course across the sky. Nothing escapes its heat but we're looking for more than heat, we want the light. So the glory of the terrestrial is another.

How do you determine what is glorious in the terrestrial realm? Well go back to the terrestrial bodies he has just described. What is a glorious bird? Is it a common wren or is it a peacock? Is it a brightly colored parrot or is it a crow? We tend to assign value or glory based on the external appearance. In fact even the word here for birds is not the normal word for birds.

It is the word that means feathered and it creates an alliteration with the word next to it there. But it has the idea of feathers. You look at a bird and its glory is determined by its feathers.

You look at a fish and its glory is determined by its size, its weight, its type. You look there's different kinds of fish but you know the Sea of Galilee tilapia were greatly prized for their flavor and their marketability. If you're a fisherman and you look in the net and which are the glorious fish? The ones that are going to feed people the best and have the most profit involved for your business.

So there's a different way of measuring glory. There is a different basis or standard or grading scale if you will. So also is the resurrection of the dead in verse 42.

Notice the body is in italics. It says it is sown in corruption. It is raised in incorruption.

But what is the it here? It's really talking about the nature of the resurrection itself. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption.

It is raised in incorruption. It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power.

It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body.

So he doesn't just say there is a physical realm and a spiritual realm. He says there is a body that exists in those realms. So a spiritual body is not made out of spirit.

It's the environment. Fish have a body that functions in water. Birds have a body that functions in the air.

Domesticated animals, humans, terra firma, right? Well, the celestial body functions in this environment. The spiritual body functions in the spiritual environment. It's no less solid, but it is designed for and functions in the spiritual realm.

And Paul set that up by talking about the difference between what is on the earth and what is in the sky. And we don't know a whole lot about what is in the sky because it is inaccessible by anything but sight. And we have a limited ability to judge what's up there.

We can say, well, star differs from star in glory, in brightness. But how much more have we learned now that we've got astronomy and Hubble and spacecraft and all the rest of it? We, getting into that realm and having closer observation, we find out all kinds of things that were unknowable being earthbound. The wonders of the universe are unfolding before us because we've gotten the ability to observe.

We've entered into that realm. When we enter into the spiritual realm, we are going to see glory that is inaccessible to us here. So he sets up a great parallel here.

You look at the way human history began. Adam and Eve were created with a sinless body. It was a perfect body in this environment.

What happened when sin entered in? Sin entered the world and death by sin. Death passed on to all men because all have sinned. And the necessary decay and the revolving generations of human history began at that point.

So you have the first man Adam, in verse 45 here, became a living being. And this is actually a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

And soul here in Greek, the suke is translating the nefesh, which is soul or life in the Hebrew. So what's his point? The spiritual is not first, verse 46, but the natural and afterward the spiritual. You have to be on the ground before you end up in the sky.

You have to learn your way around discovering relative glory on the planet, in the sea, in the air, on the land, before you can get out there and judge anything more than vaguely what is up in the sky. So the spiritual is not first but the natural and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth of dust.

The second man is from heaven. As was the dust, so also those made of dust. As the heavenly, so also those who are heavenly.

And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. This is a fairly extended section. What is his point? He is answering those first two questions.

How are the dead raised up and with what body do they come? The Greeks didn't believe there was a body. If there was any life after death, some of them thought there was, others did not. But they certainly didn't think there was a body.

And why would they think that? Because you don't see bodies creating themselves. They have to have an plant, you have to plant a seed. If you're going to have an animal, you've got to have

parent animals.

You've got to have something that gives birth to progeny so that you can have it. And they say once there's death, there's no origin point for a body. So with what body would they come if they're raised? Well, the answer is God.

The God who created all things is the God who is going to create and assign this body. And so once again you see the power of the resurrection to vindicate and be consistent with the existence of God. Once God exists, once you admit the existence of God, it's foolish to think that He cannot create a spiritual body the same way that He created all of these earthly bodies.

And it's no accident that Paul mentions the creation account in reverse order of the kinds of flesh that God created. As we have borne the image of the earthly, we will bear the image of the heavenly. So let's move down to verse 50.

Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does corruption inherit incorruption. If you're going to be in the realm of the stars and that area of glory, you can't be on the earth in a completely different kind of environment and a completely different kind of body. Nobody can fly into a star and enjoy its brightness.

You're not built for it. We're built for the earth. The heavenly is a completely different thing.

Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Corruption does not inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a secret, a mystery, something formerly hidden.

We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. And of course this famously was the sign over the nursery door in many churches with all the little babies inside. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.

I can't help but think of that any time I get to this verse. We shall not all sleep. And once again, he doesn't refer back to death or being sown.

We're back to picturing the absence of presence in this life as sleep. In a moment, the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory. Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.

But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. What is the purpose of this entire long discussion? It

answers questions that challenge the existence of God.

It lays out a reasonable case for resurrection because of the existence of God. What kind of body comes? God has assigned bodies in this life. God has assigned glories to things in the heavens.

It is trivially easy for God to determine the outcome of the resurrection. But where does this all lead? Once corruption puts on incorruption and the mortal is put on immortality, what is the end? He talked earlier about the end. Then comes the end when Christ turns over everything to the Father.

That's the purpose and the goal. When our corruption is put on immortality, then what? The common picture of heaven is walking streets of gold, playing harps, being sort of a bas-relief or a frieze, a little sculpted picture of happiness where we're just sort of frozen in a state of bliss. Not at all.

What happens to the flesh that is on this earth that God has assigned? Birds are here for a reason. Fish are here for a reason. Domesticated animals serve a purpose.

Man is here for a purpose. When all of this corruption has been superseded by that which is incorrupt and incorruptible, then what happens? Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law. I've always been troubled by the sequence of the argument here.

I would think it would be the other way around. But what is his point? If you look at this in broad strokes, it is this. The resurrection has a purpose.

God clothing us with the incorruptible, having us put it on, has a purpose. And it is the kingdom of the Father. We tend to be short-sighted.

We look for results and gratification and satisfaction in this life. At most, we think, well, after I die, everybody will be happy over there. But there is design.

There is a goal to be accomplished. There are purposes to be served. There is service to be rendered.

There is stewardship to be performed. The reason God created us, the reason He trains us in the terrestrial sphere is to prepare us for experience, service, and function in the celestial realm, in the eternal realm, in the kingdom of the Father. Even what happens in the millennial kingdom, especially for Israel, is preparation for the kingdom of the Father.

People think the millennium is a goal in itself in the same way that we often unconsciously think accomplishing things in this life is what counts. Paul is raising our gaze with the resurrection to say, what you do today, what you understand today, what you learn today, is aimed at the kingdom of the Father. Christ Himself, even when He is ruling in His own kingdom, is

accomplishing purposes so that He can turn it over to the Father and so that it transitions into the kingdom of the Father.

Thanks be to God, verse 57, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Victory over death, victory over the judgment that follows death, Hades. The law defined judgment for sin.

People say, well, my sins are harmless. They're internal. They're victimless.

It's a victimless crime. I'm not harming anyone. The world today defines sin and evil by, well, how much harm does it do? It's not hurting anyone.

If I pick your activity, let's legalize drugs. I'm not hurting anyone. We can control people not getting on the road while they're seeing visions of other planets.

We've been doing it for years with alcohol. What's the difference? But it's always defined in terms of its harm. Scripture does not define sin in terms of its harm.

There is glory that differs. There is also the severity of sin that differs. There is a sin unto death.

There is a sin not unto death. There were things that merely defiled and there were things that called forth various degrees of penalty up to and including death under the law of Moses. So when he says, O death, where is your sting? And O Hades, where is your victory? What is the victory or the sting that these would otherwise have if it were not for resurrection? What would the sting be? What would the victory be? To make of no point, no purpose, and no use all of God's work, His assignment of celestial bodies, His assignment of different kinds of flesh, of different kinds of function, your place in this world, where you were born, when you were born, what opportunities and challenges you have, all of that is rendered moot if it ends at death.

It does not matter if it has no lasting effect. If my great, great, great grandfather had a hunting dog that lived to be 12, or if he had that same dog and it died as a puppy, what difference does it make? It might have been a momentary interest at the time. What difference does it make all of the people who have lived and died on the planet? You look around out here and you've got the Cahokian cultures and all these mound builders and the Clovis people and they're trying to unearth who lived here in the Americas before the Europeans came over and found out that there were even people here.

Scores, hordes, millions, tens of millions, hundreds of millions of people lived and died right here on the hills of northeastern Oklahoma that nobody knows about. We go up there and look at the rocks and here's a couple of holes where somebody ground their corn. The people are gone, the grinders are gone, the corn is gone.

There's a hole in a rock. Mildly interesting. I don't know who made it.

I don't know when they made it. I don't know how long they used it. I don't know what the village looked like.

I don't know anything. All of their strutting and fretting their hour on the stage has perished. There is no record.

It's meaningless because it has no lasting effect. There's no remnant. A hole in a rock is all that remains and all that does is give me an illustration.

Everything we live for, everything we hope and dream, I see people just upset by all measure because by one action or another, people have been killed in warfare and they want to use it as an argument. America is responsible for the death of thousands of civilians in World War II. Guess what? All of those civilians would now be dead anyway.

Everybody that died at Hitler's hand, everybody that died in the camps, they would all have died anyway. What's your point? Well, but if Hitler had not incarcerated them and perpetrated these horrible evils on them, they would have had happy lives. Well, that might be meaningful to them, but so what? I mean, you're kind of treading a fine line here, but in terms of the universe, in terms of the fate of the planet, when the sun eventually swells up and incinerates it, if nobody can get off of here, what will it have all meant? There could have been another earth and another solar system that had billions of people living and dying for untold centuries, and its star swelled up and incinerated it.

So what? There is no meaning there. What Paul is doing here is saying there is meaning to life and there is meaning to everything you think and do because there is a God and because there is a resurrection. The details are interesting, but the purpose is more interesting because there is significance to your life to the extent that it invests in and partakes of eternity.

So in that light, death doesn't render moot whatever you thought, felt, did, how you lived, how you died, how old your dog got to be, why you ground your corn, where you ground your corn, how long you did for how many people, who else lived on the hill, did they use what is now our pond, is there a water source, and all the rest of it wouldn't make a difference. You can say, well, transiently speaking, isn't the butterfly happy when it's flying before it hits my windshield? In absolute terms, without eternal life, life itself is just sort of a quirky accident, and that's how many materialists view it. Death is swallowed up in victory.

Death does not prevail. Your life isn't rendered moot and meaningless. You are not erased with nothing to show for your presence here.

People have tried to erect monuments to themselves. Read the Ozymandias poem. I think it was Shelley who wrote Ozymandias.

It talks about two trunkless legs of stone sticking up out of the sand. Look at me and fear and all the rest of it, but all that remains is this dissolving statue. The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law, but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Instead of death being victorious, life is victorious. Instead of your existence being

meaningless, it is meaningful. God has made it meaningful.

The Lord Jesus Christ, by conquering death, invests our lives with lasting, eternal meaning. People say, well, that's the whole reason you want to believe in Jesus. You want to believe that you mean something.

You're arrogant. You really mean nothing. You're a fly on the wall.

Yeah, you go with that. Whatever you believe is going to perish with you. What I believe is going to live with me because I'm going to live with Christ, because there is a God and there is a resurrection.

It has been seen and it has been witnessed and it has been recorded. It makes all the difference. It gives us the victory.

He says, thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ. How does he give us the victory through Jesus Christ? The resurrection. It's not alone paying the penalty for sin.

It is not alone overcoming the designs of Satan and the arguments of Satan. What is it that gives us the victory? It is God's ability to take those who were in the power of death because of sin and who were under judgment because of the penalty prescribed by the law. Sin by itself, as I said earlier, people want to say, oh, well, sin is only defined by its harm.

No harm, no foul. No. The law says sin has a penalty.

And even if it harmed no one, you touched a dead thing, who was harmed? God says you're defiled. God says you're disqualified. God says by the law, there is a penalty and he has defined the standard.

So the strength of sin is what the law says that sin amounts to. And if the law says it is severe, if the law says it is death worthy, that sin isn't measured by its own effect. It's measured by its penalty, by the importance God assigns to it.

Well, that has been overcome by life because the penalty has been paid. The law has been satisfied. And because of that, life is available and God grants it.

And not just ephemeral life, not just invisible life, not just immaterial life. God materializes new life. We have a body.

It is a celestial body, not a terrestrial body. It is glorious, not inglorious. And there's a wonderful parallel.

I don't really have time to detail here where you talk about the preposition in back in verse 43. Look at the things that it is sown in. It is sown in dishonor.

It is sown in weakness. And it is sown in corruption, 42 and 43. The body is sown in corruption,

dishonor, and weakness.

As great as we think things may be in this life, there is still corruption, dishonor, and weakness. But what is on the other side of death? Incorruption, glory, and power. Incorruption, glory, and power.

Remember at the beginning of this, he delivers the kingdom to God the Father in verse 24, and he puts an end to rule and authority and power. Instead of rule and authority and power, what do you have? Incorruption and glory and power. Incorruption, glory, and power.

And notice those in 42 and 43 are in. Then he changes in verse 44. It is sown a natural body.

It is raised a spiritual body. It is in the realm of the natural that you have corruption and dishonor and weakness. It is in the realm of the spirit that we can already begin to partake of incorruption and glory and power.

That is the victory, and it should result in our gratitude to God. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Now you have therefore in verse 58.

What is the therefore therefore? Therefore, my beloved brethren, what is the result of internalizing, comprehending, and placing your faith in all of this resurrection truth? What should it do? How should we then live? Be steadfast, be immovable, and be always abounding in the work of the Lord. Why? What is the point of this entire presentation? Knowing your labor is not to no purpose. Knowing that you are not dust in the wind.

Knowing that you are not a splat on the windshield and it does not matter what happened before. This fuels our confidence and enables us to be steadfast and immovable. Nobody wants to be a rudderless ship blown about by every wind.

Nobody wants to be tossed in a sea of circumstance subject to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Steadfast, immovable, and fruitful. Do you want to be steadfast? Do you want to be a rock? Do you want to be fruitful and productive and have your life, your thoughts, your actions count? Keep track of these truths.

Keep them in the forefront of your mind. Your work is not in vain in the Lord. So our task is to be sure that our work is in the Lord, that it is conditioned by this knowledge, that it is aimed at this goal and purpose.

And so we get these wonderful details about life after death and what kind of body we will have. We can see some of the capabilities and we are intrigued by the brief observation some people had of the raised body of the Lord Jesus. But the immediate and ongoing impact of it should be to motivate us to be certain things and to do certain things.

Be steadfast, be immovable, and do the work of the Lord because it's not in vain when it's in Him. That completes the chapter and hopefully provides us some inspiration for the coming

year. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we do thank you for the truth of your Word and for the light that it shines on our path. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will help us to see its pertinence and its applicability in the hours and the days to come in this new year that is ahead of us. May our lives be fruitful.

May our character and our spiritual presence be firm and immovable. May we shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation so that others can realize that you exist, that you offer life eternal and all of the blessings that come with it. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.