

Basic Reminders – Glory to Come

1 Corinthians 15:35-49

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



Have you ever had a strong sense of anticipation? Maybe it was for a trip, a vacation, a gift, or a new stage of life. My kids love going on vacation. They talk about it all the time. Often, they will bring it up randomly, saying things like, “Dad, you know where we should go again? Texas... California... camping... Kennywood or Adventureland.” They think about these experiences and anticipate their next opportunity to experience them, even when nothing else around them has prompted a connection.

The Apostle Paul, when writing to the Corinthian church, is trying to build their anticipation of the eternal that is to come. Unfortunately, the believers in Corinth had largely been living without any sense of anticipation of eternity to come. This was in part due to their theological misunderstanding about the nature of the resurrection and the age to come. It also had to do with their understanding of what is physical and spiritual. But, more than anything else, they are just like us; we can easily go through our daily lives without a thought about eternity because we simply get lost in the everyday things of our lives. We have bills to pay, jobs to go to, and groceries to get and cook. Life is full of all of the regular things, and those regular things rarely leave time for us to think about anything more.

Let’s go back to my kid’s unbridled anticipation of vacation. Here is the deep irony of it all: they literally do nothing for vacation, and they can’t stop thinking about it. Danielle and I are the ones who make the plans, get the reservations, transport and feed the children, and ultimately, foot the bill. Yet, for everything that we do for vacation, we don’t live with the same sense of anticipation of vacation as our kids do. Why? Because Danielle and I get so caught up in the normal and regular things of life, things like vacations are largely out of frame for us on a daily basis. But the excitement and joy of our kids is infectious and reminds us that there is something really good out in the future to look forward to and anticipate. And that anticipation should actually inform our living here and now in a positive way. The same is true for our spiritual lives. When we live with a strong sense of anticipation of the eternal things to come, it positively impacts our daily lives. Tragically, when we look at the Corinthian church, we see what happens when it doesn’t. By the grace of God, we are given their example to help us not make the same mistake. What’s Paul’s counsel to the Corinthians? Remember that you are an eternal being. Here is another way of saying it: **Eternity matters because we are eternal.**

1. Eternal Beings

a. Created in the image and likeness of God.

- i. Paul reminds the Corinthians that God is the author of creation in v.38.
 1. “But God gives it a body as he has chosen...”
 2. This is an important reminder to the Corinthians that God is the creator not just of the immaterial (spiritual) but also of the material (physical).
- ii. Who is man, and what is the point of his existence? The Bible speaks to these questions, and ironically, it doesn't begin with man but with God. In the beginning, God creates man (Gen. 1:26). And, when Adam and Eve are together for the first time, God pronounces them to be “very good” (Gen. 1:31). In this, they get to live in the fullness of their created state, in the image of God and without moral flaw. This pre-fall environment allows and enables them to be in an unbroken relationship with the Father. While God alone is the embodiment of His image and the characteristics thereof, man being created in his image shares in and reflects those qualities. God is thrice holy, and so man can be holy when in a right relationship with God. God is love, and so man can experience and reflect God's original love, etc.
- iii. **Paul is rooting his theological statement in v. 38 in Gen 1:26.**
 1. **Image = Reflect God's characteristics.**
 - a. As created in the image of God, all people (no matter their spiritual condition) have a moral conscience, a spiritual dimension, intelligence and abstract thinking, and a relational nature. We share these things in part with God. He is the perfect embodiment of them while we reflect these realities.
 2. **Likeness = Eternal Beings**
 - a. We are created as eternal spiritual beings, and with that, we will continue to exist into eternity. This existence is either with God through repentance and faith in Jesus or apart from God, as we have chosen in our spiritual rebellion.
- iv. **Ethical implications of the imago dei.**
 1. One of the distinctions that the Biblical creation account affords all people is the sanctity of human life. That is, human life is not merely valuable because of what it can produce but because of the image of God in every person. This value extends from the moment of conception to natural death and rejects both a utilitarian and situational ethic. The utilitarian ethic is often expressed in naturalism, stating that life is only meaningful in its ability to produce something of value. Likewise, the situational ethic asks the question of love, but too often, in the challenging matters of human dignity, the question of love is reduced to “quality of life,” which is a slippery slope on which to make ethical determinations. The orthodox Christian ethic on the sanctity of human life is to be applied in a whole-life approach. This includes the unborn, the economically vulnerable, the immigrant, the wealthy, and the elderly. Human life is valuable at every stage because God is the source of human dignity (Ps. 139:13-16).
- b. When we consider the fact that we are eternal beings, we must come to grips with the reality that everyone around us is also an eternal being.
 - i. Take a second and look around the room, everyone you see is an eternal being, as all have an eternal destiny.

- ii. Take another second and think about your family, your colleagues, friends, and neighbors... they are all eternal beings and all have an eternal destiny.
- c. **CS Lewis really helps us to get some handles on this when he writes: “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations– these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit–immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind and it is, in fact, the merriest kind which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption.”¹**
 - i. How does this change the way that you see those around you?
 - ii. How does this change the way that you see yourself?
 - iii. How does this change the way that you see your everyday life?
 - 1. Paul wanted this to be a positive driver for the Corinthians... and ultimately for us.
 - 2. Think about the glory that is to come, that awaits all believers, and be filled with joyful anticipation that changes the way you live and interact with others.

2. From one glory to another glory.

- a. The first thing that we see in this section is a statement on our creation and its eternal implications. The next thing that should then stand out is Paul’s statement about glory. We can readily admit that this section is confusing as we try to read it. That is because Paul is offering a contrasting anthropology in a way that we don’t readily think about the human existence. He is contrasting a Biblical anthropology that is rooted in the OT with a Greek anthropology that is rooted in Aristotle and Plato. Let’s dive into these two approaches and examine the implications of their differences.
 - i. **Reminder: anthropologies - the study of human biological and physiological characteristics and their evolution. Also called physical anthropology: *the study of human biological and physiological characteristics and their evolution. Also called physical anthropology:***
- b. **Paul – A biblical anthropology.**
 - i. **Body & Soul - We do not have souls, we are souls.**
 - 1. The physical and spiritual are not separate things. Instead, they are two sides of the same coin. That is, you cannot separate them without losing the whole thing.
 - 2. **Example: “Souls on board.”** – When you refer to the amount of people on a ship you refer to them as “souls.” On a ship, "passengers" and "crew" are two distinct categories. If a captain reports only the number of "passengers," the crew is omitted. If they say "people," it can occasionally lead to ambiguity in high-stress radio transmissions. "Souls" is a catch-all term that ensures **every living human being**—from the captain to the smallest infant—is included in the count for rescue operations.
 - ii. **Now and Then – The present and the eternal are not two different realities; they are connected, and in the now, we are given tastes of the then to come.**

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (1949).

1. While the Bible routinely speaks of seasons and ages, one of the distinct realities is that time is not so neatly separated. Yes, this age will end, but what is done in this life has real implications and impacts on eternity and the age to come. So they are not separated into two completely independent periods without causal connection.
- iii. **Glory to Glory – In the same way that time is tied together between two different periods or ages, so is glory.**
 1. The glory that we experience now is a taste of the glory that we will experience in full to come. The important reality is that it is not a different glory, but it is one glory in two ages.
 - a. We can think of it this way – When you’re at a meal with a cold, you only taste a small percentage of the flavor of the meal. But when you eat that same meal without a cold, you taste everything that the meal has to offer! It is the same meal, just without the hindrance of the cold. It is the same way with glory.
- c. **The Greek Anthropology – A dualistic state of separation.**
 - i. **Physical and Spiritual are completely separate items and do not mix or intertwine at all.**
 1. This position is called strong dualism. And it sees that the soul and the body are two fundamentally distinct parts of the human person, where the immaterial soul is much more central to who we are than our physical bodies. Extreme versions of this you might even denigrate the body as worthless and evil.²
 - ii. **Earthly and Heavenly (cosmos) – Just as the body and the soul are completely separate, so are the things of earth and the things of the heavens.**
 1. What is really important to understand is that when this view talks about the “heavens,” it is not talking about an eternal state of bliss. Instead, it is talking about the cosmos, the stars, and planets.
 - a. The heavens were seen as sacred and divine, while the earth was largely seen as corrupted and even evil.
 - iii. This strong dualism of the Greek view had led many in the Corinthian church to conclude that it didn’t really matter what they did with their bodies while on this corrupted planet. Their souls were clean, and they were destined for the heavenlies, that immaterial part of them and place was really all that mattered. **Paul, however, counters this faulty logic. The material and the immaterial are inseparable in the Biblical view, and therefore, what we do and how we live matters a great deal!**
- d. Paul’s counter through an agricultural image and illustration.
 - i. One of the things that I love about living in the Midwest is our tie to agriculture. I remember when I was in ministry in urban settings of Chicago and Pittsburgh, I would have to take so much time to explain the frequent agricultural examples and illustrations of the Bible. However, in Iowa, we just get it. And so did they, even in Corinth. So, Paul talks about kernels and seeds to explain this concept of a united glory now and glory then.
 1. **An acorn** - To a towering oak.
 2. **A corn kernel** - To a 7+ foot stalk.
 3. **Our earthly bodies** - To glorified bodies.

² Preston M. Sprinkle, *Embodied: Biblical Questions and Intersex and Transgender Identities* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2021), 145.

- a. Just as an acorn is inseparable from the mighty oak or the corn kernel from the stalk, so are our earthly bodies inseparable from our glorified and resurrection bodies.
- ii. **One life in two modes - One glory now in part and then in full.**
 - 1. It can be easy to think that Paul is talking about two different existences in this passage, but he isn't. He is speaking to believers about the life of believers, and that life, which is in Christ, doesn't begin out in the future; it is ongoing right now. The same life that fills us now, is the same life that we will experience in the age to come. One life in two modes.
 - 2. But as he says in the next sentence (v. 37), and this is his concern, the life that comes forth does so in a transformed "body." The use of "body" at this point in the analogy, and especially "the body that will be," indicates that this is where everything is leading. It matters not whether one speaks of "wheat" or any other grain, Paul says, one plants a "naked seed," bare grain. Although Paul will later speak of the body as "weak and subject to decay" (2 Cor. 4:7–12), there is no hint of that in this imagery. The emphasis is not on its weakness but on its being simply a seed, with no vestige of its "afterlife" visible in the seed itself. Thus the emphasis is on the transformed nature of the "body" of the seed after its "resurrection." **Nonetheless, inherent in the imagery, and crucial to it, is the fact of continuity. The one "life" is in two modes, one before and one after death and resurrection.**³
- iii. What is the life that we are filled with now? The life of Christ.
 - 1. And as those willed with the life of Christ, we are to bear the image of Christ.

3. Bearing the image of the man of heaven.

- a. Man of dust and the man of heaven. – Another crucial contrast.
 - i. **In Adam - We are living in and destined for physical and spiritual death.**
 - 1. This means that while we are living now, we are actually spiritually dead and will experience physical death, which will lead to an ultimate eternal death. The here and now in Adam is the illusion of life while actually being dead.
 - ii. **In Christ - We are living in and destined for spiritual life, even while we will experience physical death.**
 - 1. This means that while we are physically living now, we are actually spiritual alive in Christ, and even though we will experience physical death, it will lead us to eternal life. In other words, we are the most alive we will ever be, and we will never be less alive. Amazing!
 - iii. Paul contrasts Adam, the earthly man of dust, with Jesus, the man from heaven. Paul is not dependent on Philo's contrast between the heavenly man and the earthly man (*Alleg. Interp.* § 31). Paul rejects the idea that there was a heavenly first Adam and, in contrast to Philo, he sees the first Adam not as a timeless idea in a Platonic sense but as an actual historical figure. Saying that the *first man was of the dust of the earth* alludes to Genesis 2:7: 'the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground'. The *second*

³ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 781–782.

man continues the emphasis on sequence and temporality. Jesus is ‘the last Adam’ (v. 45). In saying that the second man is from heaven, Paul probably does not have in mind the incarnation, nor is he denying that Jesus was a man of dust. Instead, in accord with the context of the chapter, he considers Jesus to be the resurrected Lord. He is the heavenly man in that he is now seated at God’s right hand as the resurrected Lord of all. All people born into the world are made of dust, but those who are united with Christ also become heavenly people. Still, their heavenly existence is not yet realized. Believers have *borne the image*—that is, the likeness—of the man of dust (cf. Gen. 5:3). The word *image* means that believers have participated fully in the reality of being people of dust; but in the future, they shall also *bear the image of the heavenly man*. They will share fully in the likeness of the man of heaven; thus, they will be given a body that is imperishable and incorruptible. As Romans 8:29 says (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18), believers will ‘be conformed to the image of his Son’.⁴

- iv. The problem is that the Corinthians believed that they had already assumed the heavenly existence that was to be, an existence in the Spirit that discounted earthly existence both in its physical and in its behavioral expressions. What Paul appears to be doing once again is refuting both notions. They have indeed borne—and still bear—the likeness of the man of earth. Because of that, they are destined to die. But in Christ’s resurrection and their being “in him,” they have also begun to bear the likeness of the man of heaven. The urgency is that they truly do so now as they await the consummation when they shall do so fully.⁵
- b. Let’s come back to the C.S. Lewis quote in light of all of this information on this passage.
 - i. **CS Lewis really helps us to get some handles on this when he writes: “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations— these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind and it is, in fact, the merriest kind which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption.”⁶**
 1. How does this change the way that you see those around you?
 2. How does this change the way that you see yourself?
 3. How does this change the way that you see your everyday life?
 - ii. **Here are questions from last week for us to revisit in light of this passage:**
 1. Do I believe that God wants to use me as part of his greater story?
 2. Do my daily decisions and reactions demonstrate an eternal perspective?
 3. Do I look to join God in what he’s doing each day?

⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 323.

⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 795.

⁶ C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (1949).