

## Paul and the Resurrection of Believers

1 Corinthians 15:1-58

Chapter fifteen concerns the resurrection.

The church at Corinth was experiencing serious growing pains brought on by difficulties both theological and behavioural. Paul wrote to correct and restore this church to the normative truth of the Gospel. Reading it today is like listening to one end of a telephone conversation; we have to deduce what the other side is saying in order to fully understand the logic, substance and purpose of the argument. The apostle's message can be understood only as we listen to both sides of the conversation.

It is obvious from Paul's opening words that he is passionate to keep this church faithful to the truth, particularly as it relates to the resurrection; he has both theirs and Christ's in mind. The modern church, sometimes infected by the notion that absolute and objective truth belongs to antiquity, should take note of Paul's opening statement.

**Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the Gospel I preached to you, which you received and have taken your stand. By this Gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have received in vain. (15:1-2)**

Paul's words still cause us to sit up and pay attention. There are at least four implications.

1. The message he preached is normative because it contains a non-negotiable objective truth.
2. His message has the power to save only because it is the truth.
3. The substance of the Gospel must be believed and defended otherwise faith is grounded in a falsehood.
4. Denying the actuality of the resurrection means that faith is false; it therefore cannot be saving faith.

The problem he is addressing is stated clearly in the fourth paragraph.

**But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that that there is no resurrection of the dead?**  
(15:12)

The Corinthian church were not in denial of Christ's resurrection; they were denying their own. Here in lies the theological problem to which Paul was responding. A key question is raised. Why did the Corinthians come to the conclusion that, for them, there would be no resurrection? The point of disagreement involved what it meant to be

pneumatikos. (i.e. spiritual) They believed that they had already entered into a perfected state of ‘spirituality’ because they had received the Spirit. Correspondingly, they believed that the physical body would ultimately be destroyed because it was unnecessary and unwanted. (Greek philosophy has infiltrated their theology.) Furthermore, the notion of bodily resurrection ran counter to their belief that the highest state of spirituality possible had already been achieved. The gift of tongues they regarded as the evidence for this heightened angelic state. (Sometimes referred to as ‘over realized eschatology’.) Very few had died since Christ’s resurrection so they lived with the expectation that soon Christ would return; their own resurrection was therefore unnecessary.

Paul’s basic argument in this chapter is that Christ’s resurrection (which they accepted) was the central event which establishes their resurrection as the ultimate eschatological event. While they believed that they had already ‘arrived’, Paul believed that kingdom was ‘now but not yet’. More and better was yet to come. The thrust of Paul’s argument is that the denial of their own bodily resurrection effectively denied Christ’s.

### **The Resurrection of Christ (15:1-11)**

In the first paragraph Paul gives the details of Christ’s resurrection but he is not attempting to convince them of the actuality of Christ’s resurrection; he assumes that they already believe it otherwise he would not write **“which you received and on which you have taken your stand”**. (15:1b) His point of emphasis is that they have already believed in the resurrection of Christ as the common affirmation of the entire church. He mentions that the Gospel they received saved them precisely because it included the fact of Christ’s resurrection (15:2) so any deviation puts them in serious danger. **“Otherwise you have received in vain.”** (15:2b)

Next (15:3-8) Paul restates the commonly held creed regarding Christ’s resurrection. He mentions first that Christ died for their sins and because he follows this statement with a brief chronology concerning the appearance of the risen Lord, it is obvious that the resurrection is the event that reveals the mystery and purpose of Christ’s death; the resurrection provides the evidence that God’s has rescued mankind and all of creation from the effects of human sin by Christ’s substitutionary death on the cross. No bodily resurrection means no atonement!

Paul reviews the details of Christ’s appearance, not to convince them of its actuality, but for the purpose of establishing the ground for the rest of his argument. He means to point out that the actuality of Christ’s rising provides the foundation for his insistence that, they too, will experience resurrection. In other words, the actuality of Christ’s resurrection anticipates the actuality of theirs. Because the Corinthian’s, influenced by Greek philosophy, disassociated the physical and the spiritual, the details of Christ’s bodily resurrection are reviewed as a counter claim. Jesus was seen by so many because

his resurrection was **corporeal** and **real**. In short, his resurrection was not simply a form of ‘spiritual’ existence. It follows, therefore, that their resurrection will be the same. (i.e. bodily/real/actual/concrete/observable/corporeal/historical/physical/not a disembodied spirit of some sort)

The tradition Paul reviews in verses 6-8 functions to bring the writer and reader together around a commonly held story. Paul is not the source of these details; they have come to him through the first witnesses. The story of the resurrection is therefore the common premise on which to base the rest of his argument; they will be resurrected in like manner as Christ.

In verse 6 Paul mentions that some members had already fallen asleep. (a Jewish metaphor for death) This fact complicates the idea that Christ’s imminent return makes resurrection unnecessary. Finally, Paul wanted to establish his own apostolic authority so he mentions that the risen Christ appeared to him as he did to the apostles. Seeing the risen Christ was a necessary characteristic of an apostle and this distinctive he shared with the other apostles. The phrase “**abnormally born**” (15:7b) is elusive and no one really knows what it means. Traditionally, the phrase has been interpreted as a reference to Christ’s appearance on the Damascus road when Paul experienced the risen Christ in a manner different than that of the apostles. However, this interpretation is not very convincing since pointing out a difference tends to undermine the argument that he was, in fact, an apostle speaking with apostolic authority. (See Acts 9:4-9; 26:12-18; Galatians 1:15-17) There is at least one other possibility. The phrase was associated with ‘abortion’ so it could also be a reference to the radical and unexpected nature of his ‘conversion’ whereby he was taken from one sphere (unbelief) and placed in another (belief) by the power of Christ’s encounter with him on the Damascus road.

Paul is about to deal directly with the issue of their resurrection but before doing so he writes rhapsodically of his own apostleship. (15:9-11) He is both self-deprecating and self-assured at the same time. He recounts his former life as a Christian killer and his Pharisaic zeal to underline the radical nature of his ‘conversion’ (an inappropriate word but I can’t think of another one) made possible by God’s grace. “**But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.**” (15:10a) His point is as follows. The powerful grace that snatched him from one reality and placed him in another occurred through a real event; Christ appeared to him actually and this experience forms the foundation for the argument that follows. (15:12-34) Verse 11 encourages them to rethink their present position regarding their own resurrection. He means to say that their thinking is out of step, not only with him, but the other apostles as well. If they doubt the veracity of his teaching, they can look beyond him to the others whose authority they do not doubt.

### **The Certainty of the Resurrection of the Dead (15:12-34)**

In this section, the apostle directs his readers to the issue at hand, namely the general resurrection at the end of human history when the kingdom is handed over to God. (15:24) The following are his main assertions.

1. No resurrection for them means that Christ was not resurrected either. (15:13)
2. If no resurrection their preaching is futile. (15:14)
3. Denying their resurrection makes them witnesses to a falsehood. (i.e. They are liars.) (15:15)
4. No resurrection means that all die in their sins. (15:17)
5. Those who have died already are forever lost if there is no resurrection. (15:18)
6. Christ's resurrection reverses the effects of Adam's fall. He is the new Adam.(15:22)
7. The 'baptism of the dead' (The meaning of this phrase has been lost to antiquity.) is without effect if there is no resurrection.
8. The church's willingness to endure persecution is pointless if its claims are false. (15:30-32)

Using a meticulously crafted argument, Paul now sets out to show that their thinking leads to an unintended absurdity. In effect, he says, "Let's assume for a moment that you are correct when you say there is no general resurrection of the dead." He then proceeds to show that their assertion leads to a logical catastrophe even by their own standards. He reasons that if there is no resurrection for them, then the claim that Christ rose is logically invalid. (This argument assumes that Christ's resurrection is not under dispute otherwise the argument would be powerless.) Their rejection of their own resurrection means that there can be no single incidence of resurrection either. (i.e. 'If this then that' is the form of the argument.) (15:13)

The five verses which follow introduce both a moral and theological argument. If there is no resurrection then they (and him) are guilty of perpetuating a monumental lie. (moral) (15:15-16) Secondly, the death of Christ on the cross has no redeeming effect and they die in their sins. (theological)(15:17-19)

What the apostle writes in the next verse (15:20) demands that we cross the cultural divide between him and us and enter into the logic of his eschatological world view. Admittedly, his agricultural metaphor may strain the contemporary mind somewhat. The thrust of his argument is that the bodily resurrection of Christ has set off an inevitable chain of events that will result in the resurrection of those who have already died just as the appearance of "the first fruit" promises a full harvest sometime in the future. It is identical to saying that a down payment serves as a guarantee that full payment will eventually follow. For Paul, the resurrection of Jesus is nothing short of a promise that God will bring to new life everyone who has already "fallen asleep". Christ's resurrection demands theirs otherwise death remains undefeated; the sacrificial death of Christ is therefore pointless.

Paul continues to drive his main point home with a reference to the scene in the original garden; Adam brought sin and death into human experience when he chose to blur the line between creature and Creator. Adam, bent on being the definer of his own existence, rejected the one limitation God gave him thus setting in motion the downward spiral of human history. (This is what original sin means.) The resurrection of Christ provides the counter event that reverses the disastrous consequences of Adam's fall. Christ, by his atoning death and resurrection, becomes the 'new Adam' (i.e. Adam in reverse) because he conquers death and counters the consequence of Adam's disobedience. (Genesis 3) This is what Paul means when he writes, **"For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive"**. The Corinthians cannot, therefore, deny their own resurrection because it is the effect God wills through Christ's resurrection. (15:21-22)

The Gospel writers may have had in mind this very truth when they recorded the events that took place in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:40-46) There, Jesus' obedience sent him to the cross and made possible the reconciliation of mankind to God whereas Adam's disobedience did the opposite.

The apostle has set his case before them by speaking of Christ as the one who reverses the effects of Adam's sin. The anticipated question raised is "Where is this reversal if believers continue to die"? The next six verses (15:23-24) set out his eschatological vision in order to say that Christ's resurrection (first fruit) anticipates the time when death will be vanquished for all time. When God's kingdom is in full bloom death's dominion, power, and authority will be destroyed. This era is partially present now but its complete realization is in the future. (i.e. Now but not yet.)

The language of verses 25- 28 seems fantasy-like to the modern reader. Two different reigns are mentioned. The first is the reign of Christ's and the second God's. The first is for the interim; it will be replaced by the second and final reign. Again Paul writes by anticipating objections. He imagines someone saying, "Paul, you say that death is conquered. Why then are people still dieing?" Once more, the problem Paul is addressing is the fact that death still exists even though he has argued that it has been conquered by Christ's resurrection. What he has written in these four verses deals with the tension between what he said about the defeat of death and its continued presence as a human reality. The first reign, he says, is a time when death is being defeated in a way that assures the second reign. At this time, the enemy (death) will be routed and the battle finally over. Throughout this entire argument Paul has made his position clear; he is talking about their resurrection as well as Christ's. Verse 28 has the air of a metaphor where the apostle finds a way to say that the purpose of God contained in Christ has been completely realized; nothing else needs to be accomplished. The rule of the Son will be consumed by the Father's.

The next paragraph (15:29-32) begins with two questions meant to display the absurdity of their disbelief.

**1. Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? (15:29)**

Several scholars have tried to explain what is meant by the baptism without success. Various explanations can be found in any scholarly commentary on First Corinthians suffice to say that no one really knows the background of this practice. There is no mention of it in the rest of the New Testament and there seems to be no evidence that it was ever widely practiced. Paul has chosen not to dispute the ritual itself because doing so would not serve his argument. It is unlikely, however, that Paul would have actually approved of it because it has the odor of a ritualistic pagan cult. In any case, the reader does not need to know what took place or why in order to comprehend Paul's words. Obviously, the practice had something to do with affecting the resurrection of those already dead and as such, it was pointless if there was no resurrection in the first place. If the dead are dead so they cannot be resuscitated by a ritual if there is no resurrection in the first place.

The fact that Paul uses this strange practice in no way confirms it as valid. In the present day, Mormons use this text as a justification for this ritual.

**2. And as for us why do we endanger ourselves every hour? (15:30)**

Lastly, the author states the obvious. He shares with them a difficult and dangerous life for the sake of the Gospel. If there is no resurrection the Gospel is false. Suffering for the sake of a lie is preposterous; they would be better seeking pleasure now since there is no resurrected future.

Paul changes his tactic in the paragraph that follows. He uses an argument 'ad hominem' and he begins with a paraphrase of Proverbs 22:24-25.

**Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character". Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God – I say this to your shame. (15:33-34)**

The reason Paul launches into this 'ad hominem' critique is not obvious at first reading. Seeing his rational requires the reader to reflect carefully on why their denial of the resurrection would lead to sinful behaviour. He seems to have in mind more that just the fact that their deficient theology is sinful. Both sinful acts as well as sinful thinking are at issue.

The paraphrase of the proverb suggests that some members of the community are infecting the others by their denial of their own resurrection. Their theological error is corrupting character. Paul does not explain why so the reader must deduce the relationship between false theology and sinful behaviour. (What he writes should cause the contemporary church to come to terms with its theological disinterest and illiteracy.) Perhaps they discounted their own resurrection because they were convinced that they had already come to a spiritual maturity that gave them license to think and act as they wished. (See 8:9-13; 10:23-33) In other words, their ‘over realized eschatology’ produced in them a false sense of perfection in which right behaviour was a non issue. Here in lies the link between false theology and behaviour.

By way of summary, Paul’s thinking is as follows. Because the resurrection awaits them in the future, they are not yet perfected. In the meantime, he is calling them to **“Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning”**. Neither he nor the Corinthians are finished products yet so it is a time for them to be confident **“that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus”**. (Philippians 1:6b) The work that God wants to do in them requires a desire to live a sinless life. The goal demands consent and consent demands aspiration.

### **The Nature of the Resurrected Body (15:35-58)**

Up until this point in the letter, the writer has been concerned primarily to demonstrate the fact that Christ’s bodily resurrection (which they do not deny) means that believers also will be resurrected in like manner. He has also shown that it follows logically that denying the second denies the first. Whereas the first 34 verses have been dedicated to the ‘fact’ of the resurrection, Paul turns to the ‘how’ (i.e. nature) in the final section. (The two sections are about the same length.) He looks for concrete ways to illustrate an event which has no real precedence within human history apart from Christ’s resurrection. Three illustrations are used.

1. An agricultural illustration (15:36-38)
2. A biological one from the animal kingdom (15:39)
3. An illustration from astronomy (15:40-41)

A full understanding of the passage requires the contemporary reader to identify the real issue at stake. The philosophical underpinning of the dispute is assumed but not mentioned because the Corinthians knew what it was. The apostle’s view of resurrection runs counter to that which has been carried forward from Greek culture. The Corinthian understanding, derived from Greek philosophy, contended that the ‘physical’ and the ‘spiritual’ go together like oil and water; the two are irreconcilable. One cannot exist in the presence of the other so the physical had to be cast aside. In addition, the second is superior to the first so resurrection could not involve continuity with the inferiority of the physical.

The implications of their belief Paul cannot accept and for good reason. First, their notion made continuity with this life and the next impossible. He was convinced that resurrected life which contains no past memory is not real resurrection. Secondly, their position on the matter was in flat denial of Christ's 'bodily' (i.e. physical) resurrection confirmed by his post resurrection encounters with as many as five hundred observers. (15:6)

Two questions begin this part of the chapter that clearly identifies the apostle's concern and the second one consumes the majority of Paul's interest. Both of them can be read as raising the same issue. (15:35)

Paul begins to build his case on what was most familiar to them – planting and growing seeds. (15:36-38) What's his point? Traditionally, scholars have interpreted the first illustration as if Paul is attempting to explain why death occurs as if his position is that death is the preliminary step that resurrection requires. In the opinion of this writer, this is not Paul's primary concern. The apostle is confronting their philosophical objections by illustrating continuity between the earthly body and the resurrected one. In other words, he is offering a rejoinder to the notion that spiritual perfection is alien to that which is material.

The modern reader, in the interest of seeing his point, has to place his/her modern understanding of seed germination to one side. We know that a seed contains within itself what is required to become a plant. The illustration is not intended to point out that the resurrection is an inevitable event brought on because the earthly body contains all that is necessary for the resurrected body. Paul, contrary to modern science, saw that the seed needs the intervention of God in order for it to become a mature plant otherwise he would not have said, **“But God gives it a body as he has determined .... “** (15:38a) Resurrection, therefore, occurs only because God intervenes in the same way he does in the case of seed germination. From this illustration the apostle wants his readers to draw the following conclusion. The fully matured plant, even though it has its own unique body, still has continuity with the seed that was planted in the first place. Similarly, their resurrected bodies will have continuity with their bodies now. The appearance of the resurrected body may be different but it will be of the same essence and character. Paul wants them to admit that their thinking is at cross purposes with the truth contained in his illustration.

Next two illustrations that elaborate on the phrase **“ ... he gives its own body”**. (15:38b) In verse 39 Paul demonstrates an understanding that would have made Darwin proud. Animals have been given bodies that adapt them to their environment. This is the reason why he writes, **“All flesh is not the same .... “** (15:39a) His illustration is meant to make a single point; just as the body of an animal is fashioned to suit its environment so the “natural body” is changed to the “spiritual body” required by its new environment.

The new body is not a disembodied spirit that replaces the old physical one. Rather, it is the natural body brought to completion (made spiritual) at the resurrection.

Paul continues to illustrate as he refers to several other kinds of bodies. Earthly bodies are contrasted with heavenly ones and for emphasis he also contrasts the sun, the moon, and the stars. All of them, including the earthly body, have their own unique “splendor”. The point being made is that there is an obvious intended diversity within creation that mirrors another kind of diversity; God will give to each individual a new resurrected body that will be in harmony with that person’s essential being and uniqueness. In addition, it will be a body perfectly suited for its new environment. The analogy supports his previous argument by contradicting their view that the natural body is unworthy of resurrection because the spiritual and the physical stand in irreconcilable opposition to each other. (15:40-41) The contemporary reader must use caution and not read too much into each illustration. Linking them with the central dispute provides the context necessary for an accurate reading.

The argument continues with four additional contrasts. (15:42-44a)

1. perishable vs. imperishable
2. dishonour vs. glory
3. weakness vs. power
4. natural vs. spiritual

The first word of each contrast is associated with the earthly body and the second with the resurrected body.

1. The earthly body decays (perishable) while the resurrected body (of the same essence) does not. (imperishable) The body’s new immortal nature means that the effects of Adam’s sin have ended.
2. “Dishonour” suggests a more lowly incomplete state in contrast to a state of “glory” where each individual is perfected thus enabling them to live in complete harmony with God.
3. The current body is weak in that it is a victim of Adam’s fall and therefore not fully conformed to the image God intends. The resurrected body is described as powerful because the ravages of Adam’s sin have been finally defeated and only the image of God remains.
4. The final two contrasting words have nothing to do with what the ‘stuff’ the makes up the body. If spiritual meant immaterial, (i.e. non-physical) Paul would be arguing against himself. Natural means imperfect and spiritual means perfected.

The next paragraph's (15:44b-49) is difficult to sort out and much controversy swirls around it so keeping the issue in mind is helpful. Paul uses an analogy. The Corinthians, thinking they have already achieved a perfected state, reject the inevitability of their own resurrection on the grounds that it is (a) unnecessary and (b) because 'spiritual perfection', by its nature, must exclude the 'physical body'. This is the notion Paul is rejecting and his analogy seems to suggest that:

1. Adam is a representative figure for their present existence. Like him, they also are destined to die.
2. However, Christ's bodily resurrection provides the guarantee that they will eventually bear his likeness 'in heaven'.
3. In the meantime, they are called to "bear the likeness of the man from heaven". (15:49b)

The paragraph begins with a statement in which Paul counters their objections to their own resurrection; he states that there are two realities. **"If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body"**. (15:44b) The second reality is not a contradiction of the first because the first anticipates the second. (Remember that the word 'spiritual' does not mean non-material) While they believe that the 'spiritual' and the 'physical' cannot co-exist, Paul states that the spiritual body involves a completion of the earthly body. He then uses Adam and Christ as representative figures to illustrate. They are now 'Adam like' in that they are mortal and sinful as he was. Nevertheless, they live in expectation that Christ's resurrection guarantees the second reality in which they will be perfected. **"And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven"**. (15:49)

Admittedly, these are difficult verses made more transparent only as the reader keeps in mind the essential issue with which Paul is dealing; they must await their resurrection in order to be complete. (i.e. spiritual) The Corinthians believed that they had already assumed a heavenly existence that is, from the apostle's point of view, yet to be. In addition, they discounted the notion that a future resurrection could involve a completion of their earthly body. Paul's argument is that they still bear the likeness of Adam but are destined to die and be perfected because they are included in Christ's bodily resurrection.

#### **"And We Will Be Changed" (15:50-58)**

With these mystical verses Paul's argument comes to its climax. Again, the reader must keep in mind the misunderstanding with which he is dealing. The Corinthians believed that already they had achieved a state of 'perfection' evidenced by the gift of tongues. In addition, they were convinced that that the material cannot embrace the spiritual. He has countered this error by arguing that the nature of Christ's resurrection is an archetype for theirs. Because Christ rose 'bodily' from the grave, their resurrection is 'bodily' as well; there is continuity between what they are now and what they will be at the "sound of the

last trumpet”. Every believer has unique characteristics which will be perfected (i.e. made spiritual) in their resurrected life. Whereas they believe themselves to be already ‘complete’, he argues that they are not yet suited for the life to come. This is what he means by, **“I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.”** (15:50) He cannot mean that the material is replaced by the immaterial. Such a reading renders violates Paul’s logic and makes him self- contradictory.

**“We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed”** is (15:51b) an indication that Paul expected Christ’s return in his life time but prediction is probably not the reason for his statement. He may have in mind the voice of an objector who says the following. “Paul, you say that we, like Christ, will be raised bodily. You also say that our present bodies are not suited for God’s kingdom so the bodies of those already dead require transformation. If Christ returns before we die what happens to us”? The apostle’s answer is straight forward. **“ .... we will all be changed”**.

Their unsuitability for resurrected life is noted by the word “perishable”. Their bodies are perishable because their lives have been impacted by Adam’s fall, the event which brought death into the world. The ‘perishable’, he writes, cannot inherit the ‘imperishable’. That is to say, the effects of Adam’s fall must be countered by Christ’s death on the cross and confirmed by the resurrection. **“Death has been swallowed up in victory”** (15:54b) and **“He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** (15:57)

Christ’s resurrection, rather than their own achievements, is the event which ‘clothes’ them in immortality. So effective is his death and resurrection that they will be changed **“in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet”**. (15:52a) After the sounding of “last trumpet” (Jewish imagery announcing the time when God’s reign is fully realized) God will have defeated evil and mankind will be rescued from the effects of Adam’s fall. (symbolized by the swallowing of death by victory) (See Isaiah 25:8)

The victory Paul speaks of in verse 56-57 gives emphasis to what Christ’s death and resurrection accomplished. The effect of sin in bringing death into the creation is ended by Christ’s victory as is its power through the law. (15:56) How is it that “the power of sin is the law”? (15:56a) Paul was a Jew so his fundamental belief was that the law was good. Even so, he taught that the law was sin’s instrument because Israel could not know **“what sin was except through the law”**. (Romans 7:7b) Either he means that ‘the law’ leads to the pride of achievement or that the law, by naming sin, creates the opportunity for sin to take hold. (i.e. The forbidden fruit is the most desirable.)

In typical fashion, the apostle ends with an exhortation. (15:58) Initially he asks them to remain true to his teaching (15:58a) so that they can continue in the Lord’s work. (15:58b) Lastly, he assures them that their work will achieve a Godly purpose only as they hold fast to the normative truth he has taught them.

The apostle has argued his case vigorously but without animosity; they remain his brothers. (15:58a)

Many contemporary people have at least a vague sense that life may not end at the grave. If pressed, many would express the view that the body remains in the grave but the soul lives on somewhere or other because it is the one aspect of every person that cannot die. The soul, they would argue, is immortal. Paul disagrees! When a person dies they are in every sense dead. He did not believe that the body dies while the soul (disembodied spirit) lives on. His teaching is that our resurrection is made possible by the resurrection of Christ; it does not occur because we possess a 'built in immortality' called the soul. He also taught that our resurrection follows the pattern of Christ's. Resurrection includes the transformed earthly body because resurrected life is continuous with earthly life. The essence and unique characteristics of each person continue but are perfected "at the sound of the last trumpet". Heaven is the place where we will remember our past history and know each other. In heaven disembodied souls are nowhere to be found.

