

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of theology today by continuing to examine soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. We are now ready to discuss the eighth, and final, item in the order of salvation, or the *ordo salutis*, and that is glorification. Dr. Spencer, how would you like to begin?

Dr. Spencer: By reminding our listeners of all eight items in the *ordo salutis*.

Marc Roby: Very well. The list we are using is the following: first, effectual calling; second, regeneration; third, repentance and faith, which together are called conversion; fourth, justification; fifth, adoption; sixth, sanctification; seventh, perseverance; and finally, eighth, glorification.

Dr. Spencer: And glorification is a magnificent topic. The term refers to the fact that when Christ returns, believers will receive glorified bodies, often called resurrection bodies. We are told about this in 1 Corinthians 15:21-23 where we read, “For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.”<sup>1</sup> And then, in Verse 35 Paul anticipates a couple of questions. And he writes, “But someone may ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?’”

Marc Roby: Yes, those are perfectly natural questions.

Dr. Spencer: They are, and Paul’s answer will not satisfy all of our curiosity, but it does tell us what we need to know. And while those questions are natural and can be perfectly innocent, they can also come from a heart of unbelief. They can be someone saying, essentially, that the resurrection from the dead makes no sense. They might, for example, really be saying, “When someone dies because of old age or an accident, or their body has been in the grave a long time and decayed, how can they possibly come to life again, don’t be silly. Such things are impossible.”

Marc Roby: I can easily imagine that being the attitude of many people. But the apostle Paul dealt with that attitude when he was defending himself before King Agrippa. In Acts 26:8 we read that Paul asked the rhetorical question, “Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?”

Dr. Spencer: And the answer to that question is obvious. If you admit the existence of the eternal, almighty God who created this universe, then raising the dead is not a big deal. And so, in answering these questions about the resurrection, Paul first deals with that unbelief. He mildly rebukes those who question the idea of a resurrection by beginning his answer, in 1 Corinthians 15:36, by saying, “How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.” And he then goes on to discuss plants as a common example of something similar.

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You sow a seed, and only when the seed dies, so to speak, does the new plant grow. And while the form of the plant is determined by the seed, the plant does not look like the seed.

**Marc Roby: And at that time, the process of a seed growing into a plant was very mysterious.**

Dr. Spencer: It certainly was. And it still is to most people, although plant biologists obviously now have a good understanding of the process. But Paul is pointing out that there is a similar situation known by everyone in the natural world, so why should people be so surprised if God promises to transform, in a somewhat analogous manner, our natural bodies into something new? And there is both discontinuity and continuity in the way plants reproduce. A seed is not the same thing as the plant, that is discontinuity. But the plant comes from and is determined by the seed, that is continuity.

**Marc Roby: Paul expresses these ideas of both continuity and discontinuity in the next verse. In 1 Corinthians 15:37 he writes, “When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.”**

Dr. Spencer: And then, after discussing different kinds of bodies, Paul goes on in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 to say, “So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.”

We are told a lot in these verses. Our resurrection bodies will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual bodies.

**Marc Roby: Now, most people probably contrast spiritual with physical, so they may wonder how a physical body can be spiritual.**

Dr. Spencer: And physical *is* frequently contrasted with spiritual, so that is not at all an unreasonable thing for people to wonder about. But the words are used in other ways too. Wayne Grudem points out that “In the Pauline epistles, the word ‘spiritual’ (Gk. *pneumatikos*) never means ‘nonphysical’ but rather ‘consistent with the character and activity of the Holy Spirit.’”<sup>2</sup>

He says a clear paraphrase of Paul’s meaning in this verse would be, “It is sown a *natural* body subject to the characteristics and desires of this age, ... but it is raised a *spiritual* body, completely subject to the will of the Holy Spirit and responsive to the Holy Spirit’s guidance.”<sup>3</sup>

**Marc Roby: I like that paraphrase. It seems to capture the meaning of what Paul is saying.**

Dr. Spencer: I like it as well, although I must point out that I cut something out. Grudem’s full statement began by saying, “It is sown a *natural* body subject to the characteristics and desires of this age, and governed by its own sinful will ...”. I left out the phrase about being governed by its own sinful will because I think it is open to misunderstanding. In Romans 8:9, Paul wrote the

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<sup>2</sup> W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, pg. 832

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

following about believers: “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.” Now, everyone is governed by his will, and our wills do still have sin, but we are no longer slaves to sin as Paul argues in Romans Chapter Six. We have the power to say “No” to sin.

**Marc Roby: I agree with your change. But the rest of the statement is good. Paul’s intent was not to imply that our resurrection bodies will not be physical – they are, after all, still called bodies – but rather, his intent clearly was to show that our resurrection bodies will in some way be qualitatively different from the bodies we have now. They will be fit for living eternally in the new heaven and the new earth.**

Dr. Spencer: I think that’s right. And notice that our resurrection bodies will be superior in every way to our present natural bodies. In the list Paul gave in Verses 42-44, every trait of the resurrection body is superior to the corresponding trait in the natural body. The natural body is said to be perishable, dishonorable and weak, whereas, the resurrection body will be imperishable, glorious and powerful. And this list is, of course, meant to be representative, not exhaustive.

**Marc Roby: The word dishonor is an interesting choice. Can you flesh out more fully what that word means in this context?**

Dr. Spencer: It is interesting, so I’m glad you asked. The Greek word translated as dishonor in 1 Corinthians 15:43 is ἀτιμία (atimia) and could also be rendered disgrace or shame.<sup>4</sup> It is the same word Paul used in Romans 1:26 where he says that “God gave them”, referring to those who rejected him, “over to shameful lusts.” Sin is shameful. And even though a believer is no longer a slave to sin, in other words we are not controlled by sin, we do, nonetheless, still have sin dwelling in us, so there is still shame. The good news is, that when we die, God perfects our soul. We will no longer have any sin in us. We will be incapable of sinning.

**Marc Roby: Hallelujah! That is a wonderful thought.**

Dr. Spencer: It is a wonderful thought indeed. And for the majority of believers, who have either already died, or will die before Christ returns, their sin is removed even prior to receiving the resurrection body.

The writer of the book of Hebrews contrasts the glorious offer of grace made to us with the covenant God made with the people through Moses on Mount Sinai, which is embodied in the Ten Commandments. In Hebrews 12:22-24 he wrote, “But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the

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<sup>4</sup> W. Bauer, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd Ed., Revised and augmented by F.W. Gingrich and F. Danker, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979, pg. 120

mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”

**Marc Roby: That is incredible. Thousands upon thousands of angels and the spirits of righteous men made perfect. Clearly, these believers exist, at this time, as disembodied spirits. But they are perfect, which must mean that they are without sin.**

Dr. Spencer: That is certainly true. Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 15:49 that “just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.”

**Marc Roby: In other words, just as we now have a sinful nature that is inherited from Adam – who is the earthly man spoken of here – so shall we then bear the likeness of Jesus Christ, who is the man from heaven.**

Dr. Spencer: That is the meaning, yes. We must never forget that Jesus Christ is eternal. He didn’t begin to exist at his incarnation. He is not created, he is God. He came *from* heaven to earth to save people.

And getting back to our resurrection bodies, not every believer will experience physical death. Paul also tells us about those who are still alive when Christ returns. In 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 he wrote, “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—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.”

When he says that we will not all sleep, that is a euphemism for physical death. Those who are still alive when Christ returns will be changed in the twinkling of an eye. The dead will be raised, but those who are still alive will be instantly changed.

**Marc Roby: That will be an amazing event to say the least. Philippians 3:21 tells us that Christ “will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is an indescribably wonderful thing to anticipate. But before we go on to discuss glorification further, I think it is important to draw a conclusion from 1 Corinthians Fifteen about how we should live now. Paul closes this amazing chapter by writing, in Verses 57-58, “But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 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.”

**Marc Roby: That is a marvelous exhortation. No one likes to do work that turns out to be in vain. But God promises that our work in the Lord, is never in vain.**

Dr. Spencer: And so we need, as Paul wrote, to give ourselves fully to that work. As he said in Ephesians 2:10, “we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” The Christian life is full of joy, but we are to work hard.

And so we have something wonderful to look forward to even prior to Christ’s return, our souls will be perfected when we die. But glorification, properly speaking, refers to our final, eternal state. We were created as creatures with both a body and a soul, or spirit. And we will exist in

the future, and forever after that, as perfected creatures with perfect, sinless souls and perfect resurrection bodies.

Marc Roby: That makes me think of when Jesus was teaching his disciples that no one knows when he will return. In Matthew 24:44-46 Jesus said, “So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.”

Dr. Spencer: Those verses also make clear that we are to be busy in this life doing the work that God has ordained for us to do. This theme is repeated in a number of places because of its importance. As just one more example, we read in Luke 12:35-38 that Jesus said to his disciples, “Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night.”

Marc Roby: That’s incredible! The master will actually wait on his servants.

Dr. Spencer: It is incredible, but the parable is not nearly as incredible as the reality. We will be glorified only because Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master, took our sins upon himself and died for us.

Marc Roby: Now, that is more incredible than the parable. And, as you said, the message of those parables, and other passages, is clear. We are saved by grace, but we are saved *unto* good works as the King James renders that part of Ephesians 2:10. We have work to do.

Dr. Spencer: And returning to our discussion of glorification, 1 Corinthians Fifteen is not the only place the Bible speaks about this future reality. Most notably, there is an amazing passage at the end of 1 Thessalonians Chapter Four.

Marc Roby: Yes, let me read that passage. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Paul wrote, “Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 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. 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. Therefore encourage each other with these words.”

Dr. Spencer: I can’t imagine something more encouraging than that. We will never die in the ultimate sense of that word. Unless Christ comes again first, we will all die physically, but that is

not eternal death. And Paul says that God will *bring with* Jesus those who have fallen asleep. In other words, when Christ returns, he will bring with him all believers who have already died. These are the souls of righteous men made perfect that we were told about in Hebrews 12:23. As Paul wrote, those who are still alive when the Lord returns will not precede those who have fallen asleep. In other words, those who are alive when Christ returns will not receive their resurrection bodies before the believers who have previously died.

**Marc Roby: All believers will be glorified together. We are united as the body of Christ.**

Dr. Spencer: That's right. And so Paul says that "the dead in Christ will rise first. 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." I think Grudem interprets this correctly.<sup>5</sup> He says it is the souls of believers who have died that will return with Christ and their bodies will be raised from the dead to be joined with their souls. And, of course, those will be resurrection bodies, not natural ones.

**Marc Roby: That will be an indescribably wonderful day for believers. But this passage raises one small question. Paul wrote that "we who are still alive" at the coming of the Lord. There are some who would say that this implies Paul expected Christ to return in his lifetime.**

Dr. Spencer: Well, grammatically, that could be true, but is not at all necessary and, in fact, I don't think it is reasonable. Paul clearly wrote and ministered with the realization, and I would say even the expectation, that many people would be brought to faith based on the written testimony of the apostles long after they were all gone. But independent of what his expectations were, it is not at all necessary to assume he thought Christ would return during his life. He used the first-person plural pronoun "we" as a literary device to include himself with his readers.

**Marc Roby: Very well. I think we have presented the basics of the doctrine of glorification and I look forward to continuing our discussion, but we're out of time for today, so I'll take this opportunity to remind our listeners that they can send questions or comments to [info@whatdoesthewordsay.org](mailto:info@whatdoesthewordsay.org). And we will do our best to respond.**

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<sup>5</sup> Grudem, op. cit., pg. 829