

# First Corinthians

August 31, 2025

Chapter 15

## The Matters of Worship Services – Part 7

“The Purpose of Worship in the Church”

Chapter 15: 40 – 58

### (a) Heavenly Bodies vs Earthly Bodies (15:40)

Paul further explains that there is a distinction between heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, as stated in verse 40.

*<sup>40</sup> There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another.*

While Scripture describes the heavenly bodies that saints will possess when we transition from our earthly forms, our current earthly minds struggle to envision these bodies. Not only is it challenging to imagine our future selves, but we also find it difficult to picture the heavenly beings of God the Father, the angels, and the four living creatures mentioned by Daniel and in Revelation. We must not forget the twenty-four elder priests who have been worshiping at the throne since their creation on the first day.

Paul uses the word “glory.” What does he mean? “Glory” refers to the *splendor and majesty of a divine quality*; it is the manifestation of God’s magnificence. What distinguishes the “glory of the heavenly” from the “glory of the earthly?” Paul has noted how vastly different the glory of the LORD was in his earthly body before His resurrection, compared to the glory of the risen LORD who spoke to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 26:13-15).

*“While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ And I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting (Acts 26:13-15).*

Jesus only glowed with the glory that Paul witnessed on the Damascus road once in His earthly body. This happened when Jesus was seen alongside Moses and Elijah.

*Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him (Matthew 17:1-3).*

**(3) Examples We Can See (15:41)**

To be thorough, Paul does not want the Corinthians to overlook the fact that in the heavens, there are various “glories” among the objects visible in the night sky.

*<sup>41</sup> There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.*

Our night skies brim with the splendor and majesty of God’s creations. Yet, even to our eyes, we can see that these heavenly bodies do not appear the same. We perceive the differences in the “glory” of the sun, moon, and stars because we can observe them. However, Paul knows something unique about the stars. What does he mean when he says, “*for star differs from star in glory*”? Paul suggests that there is a distinction in the nature of all the stars. Only in recent years, through space exploration, advanced tools, and scientific methods, have we begun to grasp the truth of what Paul has articulated. Let us not complicate things too much at this point. Nevertheless, scientists have worked to classify various types of stars and stellar objects based on their temperatures, luminosities, and colors. If they are correct, these three criteria in the classification of each star reflect the variations in the physical composition of the gases within it. It is intriguing that in the color scheme they have developed, they assert that some stellar bodies observed through our telescopes are too hot to be planets, yet too cold to be stars. Therefore, science once again supports the Bible’s accuracy when Paul states, “*for star differs from star in glory*.”

**(4) Example We Cannot See**

**(a) The Perishable and Imperishable Body (15:42)**

Continuing, Paul shifts from examples of the visible to one of the invisible. To illustrate this, he compares the perishable body to the imperishable one. He understands this through his personal witness of the LORD’s perishable body while He was on earth and the imperishable body of the LORD following His resurrection. Verse 42.

*<sup>42</sup> So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body;*

When Jesus’s body was laid in the tomb, it was a specific kind of body. It depended on the heart to pump blood to every cell. It couldn’t enter a room without going through a door (John 20:26), it would bleed if cut, feel pain when injured, shrink when starved, and grow when nourished. In the grave, it would decay and return to dust.

Three days later, his body transformed into a glorious, imperishable form. It no longer needed to open doors to enter rooms (John 20:26). It did not need sustenance to survive and could not be harmed or injured. It could not bleed, yet it remained a type of flesh and bone, though distinct from the body before resurrection. The earthly body could die, but the resurrected body could not perish.

**(b) Dishonor vs. Glory (15:43a)**

Paul begins to compare the earthly and heavenly bodies of the saints.

*<sup>34a</sup> it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory;*

When the saint dies, his body will be placed in the grave. The Greek word for “dishonor” is *psychikon*, which means *natural, worldly, or uninspiritual*. It signifies a regular body made from the dust

of the earth. Upon its resurrection, it will be raised in glory—splendor and majesty, as well as a spiritual essence. It is no longer just a body formed from the dust of the earth.

**(c) Weakness vs. Power (15:43b)**

<sup>34b</sup> *it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;*

When the saint dies, his body will be laid in the grave; it is weak and lacks strength. When it is raised or resurrected, it is raised in glory, with glorious spiritual power.

**(d) Natural vs. Spiritual Body (15:44a)**

<sup>44a</sup> *it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.*

Paul states that if a saint's body is buried in its natural (dishonored) state, following Jesus' example, it will eventually be raised in a spiritual state, resulting in a new and different type of body.

**(i) The Natural vs the Spiritual (15:44b)**

Paul says,

<sup>44b</sup> *If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.*

Paul's point contrasts the natural with the spiritual. For Jesus, His earthly body is natural, while His heavenly body is spiritual. Similarly, Jesus has promised the same for us. We have a natural body, and one day we will have a spiritual body.

**(e) The First and Last Adam**

**(i) Living Soul vs Life-giving Spirit (15:45)**

Paul is now illustrating the Lord's first human creation—Adam. Verse 45.

<sup>45</sup> *So also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.*

When the LORD created Adam, He breathed into him the breath of life. In that body, Adam's soul came alive (Genesis 2:7). With the last Adam (Jesus), there came spiritual life and the spiritual body. As *Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers* states, "The first Adam became, by his disobedience, a mere living soul, and from him we inherit that nature; the second Adam, by his obedience, became a life-giving spirit, and from Him we inherit the spiritual nature within us."

**(ii) Natural Man vs Spiritual Man (15:46)**

To emphasize the distinction between the natural man and the spiritual man, Paul states,

<sup>46</sup> *However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual.*

What is Paul saying? His point is that no one becomes a spiritual saint in heaven unless they have first lived on earth in a physical body. Angels, who have never existed as human beings with physical bodies, are not spiritual saints in heaven.

**(iii) The Earthly vs the Heavenly (15:47)**

To clarify further, Paul contrasts the earthly with the heavenly when he says,

<sup>47</sup> *The first man is from the earth, earthly; the second man is from heaven.*

Adam was from the earth, while Jesus came from heaven. Jesus humbled Himself to become a man on earth so that He could grant us the ability to be raised from the grave in a spiritual body and dwell in heaven.

**(f) You are Earthly and Heavenly (15:48-49)**

To the saints in Corinth and the Church, Paul states, “*You are both earthly and heavenly.*” He emphasizes this point.

<sup>48</sup> *As is the earthly, so also are those who are earthly; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly.* <sup>49</sup> *Just as we have borne the image of the earthly, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.*

The promise made to the saints in Corinth and the Church is this: because you are earthly saints, you will one day be heavenly saints.

**(g) The Image of the Earthy (Adam) (15:49)**

To further emphasize his point, Paul refers to the image of mankind (Adam).

<sup>49</sup> *Just as we have borne the image of the earthly, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.*

Once again, the promise to the saints in Corinth and the Church is this: Because you are earthly saints, made in the image of God, you will one day become heavenly saints.

**(h) Flesh vs the Kingdom of God (15:50)**

Paul warns about the flesh in contrast to the kingdom of God, as seen in verse 50.

<sup>50</sup> *Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God;*

Now we have it: the distinction between the saint and the non-saint. The saint is the one who has the LORD, while the non-saint does not. Yet, both possess flesh and blood. Simply having flesh and blood does not guarantee that you will one day be blessed to live in the kingdom of God. Non-saints will not inherit the kingdom; saints will.

**(5) Resurrection Comes Through Change (15:51-52)**

And now, Paul prophesies about the future. Verse 51.

<sup>51</sup> *Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, <sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.*

Paul has already written a letter regarding the snatching away of the saints and the resurrection of those who have died, whose bodies have been buried in the grave. Let’s review that passage to the Thessalonians.

*But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).*

It may be easy to assume that Paul is telling the Corinthian Church about the moment when the living saints on earth are snatched away and the bodies of dead saints remain in their graves. However, the snatching away event (or rapture from the Latin version) is not what Paul is addressing with the Church in Corinth. Some confusion arises from the use of the word “trumpet.” The New Testament mentions various trumpets. There will be the “trump of God,” which will be used to take the Church away from earth before the terrible tribulations begin, as recorded in Seal 6 of Revelation Chapter 7. Additionally, there are seven trumpets that signal the release of each plague on the Revived Roman Empire in Revelation. Lastly, there is the “last trump” that Paul references to the Corinthian Church. Here is a summary of that story.

*<sup>51</sup> Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, <sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.*

After Jesus reigns on earth for 1,000 years, Satan, who has been bound during this time, will be released to deceive the people on earth. Those deceived by Satan will join his army and attempt to remove Jesus from His Great White Throne in the Temple in Jerusalem. The LORD will send down fire to destroy all of Satan’s army and cast them into the Lake of Fire. Then will come the resurrection of all the lost dead in the graves from the beginning of time to stand before the LORD on His Great White Throne. Everyone raised, including non-saints and non-believers, will be sentenced to the Lake of Fire for all eternity. Next, because there are still believers in the LORD who have lived through the 1,000-year reign on earth, the “last trump” will sound. All those who were in human bodies at the end of the Great White Throne Judgment will be immediately transformed into glorified spiritual bodies. No humans in earthly bodies will remain on earth after the “last trumpet” sounds. The Holy City of God, His home, will come to rest on earth, and all those who have called upon the name of the LORD for salvation will inhabit the Holy City and live on earth in spiritual, resurrected bodies. This is why Paul refers to it as a mystery. How do we know this event is what Paul is referring to? Here’s a clue: thirty-eight years after this letter is written, the LORD will tell John in Revelation that “death and Hades” will be thrown into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14). Additionally, the LORD tells John that there will no longer be any death (Revelation 21:4). The destruction of death is the final victory of the LORD over sin. Now, let us examine the ending of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians.

#### **(6) Perishable Becomes Imperishable in Death (15:53-55)**

When discussing the transition from the perishable to the imperishable in death, Paul says,

*<sup>53</sup> For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup> But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory.” <sup>55</sup> O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?”*

Do you see it? “Death is swallowed up in victory.” <sup>55</sup> O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” Death will not be swallowed up in victory when the Church is taken away. The timeline for

the Jews and the Gentiles will continue, and many deaths will still occur after the Church is no longer on this earth.

Additionally, the Nation of Israel will not recognize Jesus as their LORD for several years after the Church is taken away. The sting of death for humanity will not be removed until no humans can die. That will not occur until every person is transformed into sinless, spiritual bodies. Death is not the loser, and the sting of death is not gone until all are transformed.

#### (7) The Sting and the Law (15:56)

Paul now refers to the sting and the Law. Verse 56.

*<sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law;*

We can easily understand that the sting of death is sin. How *can the power of sin be the law?* Paul will elaborate on this in his next letter to the Romans, Chapter 7. Benson's Commentary discusses Romans 7 as follows:

The prohibitions of the law awaken and irritate men's evil desires, supposes such desires to exist in the mind previous to these prohibitions, and that these desires, with other evil dispositions, prompt men to make trial of things forbidden, the inclination of human nature being too generally like that of a foward child, who will do a thing because it was forbidden; and perhaps is, as it were, reminded of an evil, on hearing it mentioned in a prohibition. It must not, however, be supposed, that all evil desire arises from hence; for fleshly appetites, and other strong desires, which prevail in men's minds, do not owe either their existence or their operation to the prohibitions and penalties of the law, or the knowledge thereof; but only their power to kill.... For without the law sin was dead — Neither so apparent nor so active; nor was I [Paul] under the least apprehension of any danger from it. Sin, which he still represents as a person, would have had no being, or at least no strength to kill men, had not the law, revealed or natural, existed; for the essence of sin consists in its being a violation of law. Though the apostle [Paul] speaks this primarily and directly of the law of Moses, it is equally true of the law of nature, and may be applied to the state of mankind before the law of Moses was given. For unless there had been a law written in men's hearts, sin would have been dead, or have had neither existence nor power to kill

In short, the Law of the LORD defines what He considers a sin. It is the Law of the LORD that prompts sinners to sin. It is the Law of the LORD that leads people to transgress its teachings.

#### (8) The Victory Through the LORD (15:57)

Where the Law of the LORD convicts and reveals sin, there remains victory through the LORD. Verse 57.

*<sup>57</sup> but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

What is that victory? The heartache from having transgressed the Law of the LORD should no longer trouble us. Why? Because we have been fully atoned for by the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our LORD who saves us.

**(9) The Toil Not in Vain (15:58)**

Because of the saints' victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, we do not labor in vain. Verse 58.

*<sup>58</sup>Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.*

The labor of the saints is not in vain; it will be rewarded. The saints will not simply die and cease to exist. The resurrection is within reach. Whatever you do for the LORD will not only bring a clear conscience and happiness here, but it will also be met with the glorious and eternal rewards of heaven.