***“A Spiritual Body”*** by Stephen Finlan at The First Church, February 24, 2019

**1 Corinthians 15:35–53**

35But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” 36Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed. 38But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.39Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. 40There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. . . .

42 So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. 43It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 44It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. . . .

46 It is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and *then* the spiritual. 47The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. . . . 49Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven. 50What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed. . . . 53For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

For the most part, our future life beyond this world is a mystery. But we are given a few hints in the Bible. This passage by Paul is by far the longest presentation about the afterlife in the Bible, and I didn’t even include all of it. Paul speaks with authority here. I think he has received some special instruction on this subject, and he has a right to speak confidently.

He begins by insisting that there are different kinds of bodies. He goes over this at some length. “Not all flesh is alike,” he says; they come in different kinds; “there are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies” (1 Cor 15:39–40), and they are *not* the same. They *differ* in their degree of glory (15:41). The physical body is like a seed that is sown in the ground; the spiritual body is like the plant that miraculously sprouts forth to new life. “It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body” (15:43–44). In case you didn’t get his point, he repeats it: “If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body” (15:44b).

First comes the physical, he says, then the spiritual (15:46); first the earthly, then the heavenly; first the corruptible, then the incorruptible. He insists “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. . . . We will all be changed” (15:50–51).

Paul’s teaching is clear, and important enough for him to go on at some length. And yet, believers have repeatedly overlooked Paul’s teaching on this subject and have insisted on the resurrection of the *material* body. Paul’s strongly argued view became a minority opinion.

It is because we are so habituated to the material level that we have a hard time wrapping our minds around something we cannot see. Further, we are attached to *this* body, and we tend to identify with it. We have difficulty accepting that we are not our bodies. Our bodies are important, but they are only vehicles. We will need to get new ones. Our personalities will survive beyond these material vehicles. We will get vehicles more appropriate to the sphere in which we are going to live and function.

I think Paul got it right, and we need to return to his teaching, that it is not the material body that inherits the afterlife, but a *different* body. When astronauts go into space, they need a kind of special body, a space suit that can function in *that* environ­ment. And we will need a spiritual body in order to function in a spiritual environment.

Why does it matter? Because the spirit is *real*, and not just abstract thinking. And we need to know that we are more than our bodies, and that we will survive our bodies. Further, we can contribute to our future life. Prepare the way by building up “treasures in heaven” (Matt 6:20), experiences and creations of spiritual value. What survive death are things of spiritual value. These include relationships and worthwhile memories. *All good is preserved*. You will get a chance to meet loved ones who moved on ahead of you, but you will also need to examine everything in those relationships in the light of angelic wisdom and truth. Dysfunctional relationships must be healed through honesty, understanding, and compassion. So one project in the afterlife will be the restoration and repair of relationships.

I also want to say something about the realm of potentials that were never realized here on earth. They *will* have an opportunity to be realized. If you have long had a burning desire to write a novel, you will get a chance over there. If you have wanted to really dive deeply into understanding something, but never had the time or the education, you can get it there. You can fulfill your deepest hopes and dreams. If your desire is spiritual and your hope is vibrant, you will get a chance to unfold these potentials.

As the poet, Robert Browning, said “There shall never be one lost good! What was, shall live as before . . . . On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven, a perfect round. All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist” (from “Abt Vogler”).

Heaven is not a place of idleness, nor of constant church services. It is a place of constant *growth*. That is what our spiritual parents want for us. Jesus said “In my Father’s house are many mansions. . . I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2). He is not focused on reward or punishment, but on reassuring people that they will have a secure home, a place to live and grow. In fact, spiritual growth is the principle that unites *this* life with the afterlife. Growth is the law of life. God wants to see us grow, as *any* good parent would. The afterlife is *life*; it is a place ofservice and learning. God preserves all good things.

The First Letter of Peter speaks of an “inheritance that is imperishable . . . kept in heaven for you” (1 Pet 1:4). What a wonderful promise! The spiritual realm is not boring; it is a realm of growth. And so is *this* world! Go with God! Grow with God!