

UPWARD CALL

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God

IN KING JESUS.

(Philippians 3:13-14)

#09-1505

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What Kind of Body?

One day, while I was taking a walk, I noticed acorns lying on the ground. There is an area in the back of our house where, in past years, I have planted acorns in hopes of seeing an oak tree pop out of the ground, but one has never appeared. So, I got this idea; why not put some of these fresh acorns in a pot. Over the next couple of months, I tended to our little pot and, by the way, periodically talked to the pot to encourage the acorn to grow. Yes, you read that correctly; I talk to plants and animals, as well. I could offer more insight on this subject, but it might distract from the point I want to make. Besides, you might wonder if I have a few marbles rolling around in my head. However, in my defense, I have taken our entire property as belonging to the kingdom of God, and all our plant life is thriving.

Well, during this time, I noticed one acorn I planted in the pot kept popping out of the soil. I periodically pushed it back underground only to have it reappear. I wondered to myself: How is this thing ever going to grow if it won't stay in the soil? I know God has a sense of humor because a couple of weeks ago I began to notice a little sprig of something coming up from the ground about two inches from the renegade acorn. Could it be? No! Maybe! A few more days passed and, much to our surprise and joy, a baby oak tree was springing up from the soil. It grew very fast and, in a few days, a rather large leaf (about 2.5 inches) came forth, followed by much smaller leaves. Yes; at this point, I began talking to it and touching it, encouraging it on to full growth.

At first, I did not make any connection to the acorn that was still sitting close to the top of the soil. So, one day, I decided to pull on it to see if it was doing anything. Again, much to my surprise, there was tension under the acorn when I tugged on it. I can be slow to learn, but at this point, the light bulb went on: This acorn is the source of the new oak tree.

Needless to say, this little oak tree became a teachable moment. The Lord has told us to look for the signs, so we are always on the lookout, for in them we are given spiritual insight. By the way; this is not the recommended way to grow an oak from an acorn, which only adds to this being from the Lord, who made sure both the acorn and the tree remained in plain sight so we could see the contrast between the germinal seed and the new body. Paul, the beloved apostle of the nations, best explains this teachable moment in his first letter to the Corinthians in the 15th chapter, which I often say is one of the most important set of verses in all scripture. I often wonder if it is also one of the most ignored or perhaps misunderstood. In it is discovered Paul's great defense of not only the resurrection of Christ but also of our resurrection, the redemption or deliverance of our body, which is our hope (Romans 8:23-25; Colossians 1:27). We are also given the clearest and most succinct statement of the *ultimate purpose of God*, that is, for *the Father to be all in all*.

Within the Corinth church, there was confusion over, even denial of, the resurrection of the dead. They could not fathom how the dead could or would be raised, let alone what kind of body they would have. Paul didn't use vague language to address the problem; he called such ones a fool, which, according to Strong means "mindless, ignorant, or stupid." I believe if Paul were with us today, he would use the same language in addressing the many who deny a bodily resurrection and totally spiritualize it.

Near the end of his life, Paul warned Timothy, his beloved son in the faith, that some would not accurately handle the word of truth, their talk being like gangrene. As an example, he used two men who had gone astray from the truth by saying that the resurrection had already taken place (2 Timothy 2:14-18). Obviously, these men were denying the hope presented by Paul in his gospel. In that day, these men were not denying the resurrection but claiming it had already taken place, when it had not. However, in our day, there is another teaching that, though it sounds spiritual, is simply a variation on the same denial of Paul's truth. The resurrection is taught as *solely* a spiritual reality and one that believers, especially overcomers, experience while in mortal bodies. In other words, they deny a future resurrection by replacing it with a present spiritual reality. One brother I recently read included this so-called *reality* (along with other things) in what he called a *sacred secret in which overcomers had to be initiated*. To use Paul's terminology, this is *gangrene*; of course, not the brother but the teaching.

But someone will say: *How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?* You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; and that which you sow, you do not sow the body [e.g., oak tree] which is to be, but a bare grain [e.g., acorn], perhaps of wheat or of something else [e.g., acorn]. But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds [e.g., acorn] a body of its own [e.g., oak tree]. (1 Corinthians 15:35-38 NASB [added])

Paul clearly states the principle that death leads to life, and he does it by using the example of the seed that grows into a new body that looks nothing like the seed, which must go into the ground and die in order to produce life. We could rephrase part of the above verses to read: *The acorn which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; the acorn is not the body of the oak tree which is to be, but a bare acorn.* God gives to each acorn the body of an oak tree. The acorn in our pot eventually dissolved and returned to the soil from which it came. The oak tree will continue to grow, never looking like the acorn that will be no more. Out of death comes life.

Paul continues on in his defense by pointing out that all flesh is not the same, and he catalogs the various types of flesh (e.g., men, beasts, birds, and fish). He introduces the heavenly and the earthly bodies, each having a glory of its own. Then, Paul applies the principles of verses 35-41 to the resurrection of the dead by contrasting the body (i.e., natural seed) that is sown in death to the body that is raised to life. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; 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 (nature-animated body), it is raised a spiritual body (spirit-animated body) (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

Contrary to some teaching, Paul is not proposing a new type of resurrection; he is answering his rhetorical question about the kind of body given to those raised from the dead when, in the future and in the twinkling of an eye, this mortal must put on immortality. Paul presents this as the hope of all mankind. Have the ones who are claiming a present-day spiritual resurrection and denying a future redemption of the body become immortal when Paul claims that there is only one who possesses immortality, and this one is the King of kings who was raised from the dead and is now our hope (1 Timothy 6:15-16)?

This simple illustration of the acorn and the oak tree gives us a glimpse into Paul's good news of mankind's resurrection. In our present natural body, we are like the acorn that must die to bring forth life. In the resurrection, we are like the oak tree that comes forth as an entirely different body from that which went into the ground. Jesus is our oak tree! *It has not appeared as yet what we will be; but, we know that when He appears, we will be like Him* (1 John 3:2-3).

Have you fixed this hope on Him, that is, Jesus?