

*Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas*  
*Fredericksburg Bible Church*

*107 East Austin*

*Fredericksburg, Texas 78624*

*830-997-8834    [jthomas@fbgbible.org](mailto:jthomas@fbgbible.org)*

**A1316 – April 21, 2013 – 1 Corinthians 15:50-57**  
**Inheriting The Imperishable Kingdom**

We're studying the greatest chapter on resurrection, 1 Cor 15. Last time we worked with 1 Cor 15:42-50 where Paul described the nature of the resurrection body in contrast to the present body. Starting in verse 42 watch the terms because he's going to pick up and use the first two terms **perishable** and **imperishable** over and over in vv 50-54 and my point is he's tying these sections together, they're not separate sections. Most translators love to put a periscope division between v 49 and 50 separating them in people's minds. Ignore that, he's continuing with the same theme and you see that by the use of the terms **perishable** and **imperishable** in v 42 and repeatedly in vv 50-54. In verse 42, observe, **it is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body**. The perishable body corrupts and decays but the imperishable body in resurrection never corrupts or decays. Verse 43, **it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory**. The dishonored body is a shameful humiliation, but the body raised in glory is radiant splendor. Verse 43, **it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power**. The **weak** body is subject to sickness, disease and death but the **power** body is not subject to disease and death but has awesome capabilities. Verse 44, **it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body**. The **natural** body is designed and fit for this world but the **spiritual** body is designed and fit for the world to come, the imperishable world. Verse 45, **So also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit**. This means that Adam is the source of our constitution fit for this world whereas Christ is the source of our constitution fit for the world to come. Verse 46, **However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual**. There is an order and non-overlapping sequence of the two, the natural body fit for this world first, then the spiritual body fit for the next world. Verse 47, **The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. 48As is the earthy,**

**so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. 49Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.** The point here, of course, is that just as we have been outfitted with an earthen body designed for this earth so we must be resurrected and outfitted with a heavenly body designed for heaven.

Now this heavenly body is necessary because verse 50 says the **flesh and blood body cannot inherit the kingdom of God and this perishable body cannot inherit the imperishable** state. All this verse is doing is clarifying what he's already been saying in the earlier verses. The words **Now I say this** at the beginning of the verse are actually **Now I mean this**, the Greek word being *phemi* means "I mean," not "I say" (cf also 1 Cor 10:19). So he's tying this section with the prior one to clarify or explain what he's been saying and so it should be translated **Now I mean this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.** Simply put, what this means is that our natural, earthy bodies cannot inherit the kingdom of God which is designated as the imperishable state. Instead, to inherit it we must be outfitted with a spiritual, heavenly body in order to inherit the imperishable dimension of the kingdom of God.

That much is relatively straightforward but there are three things that make this passage difficult. The first difficulty is that most Christians don't have a clue what the kingdom of God is. When they read that term they think heaven, whatever idea they have of heaven. But one thing is certain; most people do not connect it with the earth in any respect. But actually the kingdom of God does have a dimension that is related to this present heaven and earth and a second dimension related to a new heaven and new earth. So there are two dimensions to the kingdom of God and we should already know about these two dimensions from 1 Cor 15:24 where it says that Christ turns over the kingdom to the God and Father so that the first dimension is when Christ rules the kingdom on David's throne on this present heavens and earth and the second dimension is afterward when both the Father and Christ rule from the same throne in the new heaven and new earth as described in Rev 22:3. The question in verse 50 is which dimension of the kingdom of God is being referred to, which dimension can flesh and blood not inherit?

The second difficulty is that most Christians don't really understand the term inherit. When people read that term with kingdom of God they tend to think it means "go to heaven." Well, it doesn't mean that. It doesn't mean go anywhere. It has a very different meaning and we'll be working with that. But right off the bat I just point out that there are two terms here that we have to define as the Bible defines. We have no right to read into them what we might think they mean. And only when we define them Scripturally does this passage not conflict with other passages.

The third difficulty is that verses 51-57 are usually identified as a rapture passage, no matter what view of the timing of the rapture; pre, mid, post, pre-wrath, all of them typically identify 1 Cor 15:51-57 as teaching the rapture. However, there is no rapture of the Church at any time in 1 Cor 15:51-57. Paul is teaching something else.

Now having said that it doesn't mean there is no pre-trib rapture of the Church; there are plenty of other passages that teach that, I'd call to your attention the primary ones: John 14 and 1 Thess 4 that follow the same movements and the same theme. It's just that 1 Cor 15:51-57 is not one of them even though I've taught it that way, Fred has taught it that way, Charles Ryrie taught it that way, John Walvoord taught it that way. Many, many great prophecy teachers have taught it that way and I appreciate all of these men; I think they are great Bible students. But I still don't think it's a rapture passage. Why do we think when we come to this passage it's talking about the rapture anyway? What makes us think that? Because great teachers have said it over and over and over and we assumed it taught that. But I bet you never analyzed every Greek word in 1 Cor 15 that led up to this text. I bet you never analyzed Paul's argument word by word in 1 Cor 15. I have, and I will demonstrate conclusively that it is impossible that these verses are talking about the rapture of the church at any time. It's just not about the rapture of the church at all; though in reality there may be some similarities when the rapture occurs to what is described as happening here.

Now one of the ways people study the Bible is by comparing passages side-by-side and looking for similarities and differences. That's valid. And if you do a side-by-side comparison of this passage with other sure-fire rapture passages like John 14 and 1 Thess 4 you'll discover there are several differences. It's true there are some similarities, for example a trumpet is mentioned here

and a trumpet is mentioned in 1 Thess 4. But the differences outweigh the similarities by far. For example, there is no mention here of Christ descending in the air, coming for His saints, in fact there's no mention of Christ at all until verse 57! There is no mention of being caught up in the clouds. There is no mention of clouds anywhere. There is no mention of going to the Father's house. There is no mention of comfort. All common elements of rapture passages. What is mentioned is **inheriting the kingdom of God** which is the same as **inheriting the imperishable** state. What is mentioned is the necessity of being **changed** so our bodies are fit for that imperishable state. What is mentioned is the rapidity of the change that will take place, **in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye**. What is mentioned is the timing of the change, **at the last trumpet**. What is mentioned is that **the dead will be raised imperishable** at that same time. What is mentioned is that the living **will be changed** at the same time the dead are raised, both at the last trumpet; whereas 1 Thess 4 the rapture points out that the dead will be raised first, then those who are alive and remain- so there is an order at the rapture, but not at the last trumpet. And finally what is mentioned is that this will all occur in connection with the end of death. Verse 54 says at this time the saying will come about, **"DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory."** So when the last trumpet sounds nobody will ever die again, nobody could die again, death no longer exists. And the only time death can no longer exist is when we enter what Paul calls the **imperishable** state. So all of this is at the end of history and none of it is before the end of history.

This can't be the rapture because the rapture occurs more than 1000 years before the end of death and history. There is a lot of death still to come after the rapture, no matter what you believe about the timing of the rapture of the Church, there is still at least 1000 years of death. So this can't possibly be the rapture. This is a change that will occur at the end of history to bring the believers then into the imperishable state; when death will be defeated finally and forever. So clearly this will not occur until the end of the present heavens and earth and the beginning of the new heavens and new earth known also as the eternal state. So this passage does not parallel rapture passages.

The passage that it does parallel is earlier in this same chapter, 1 Cor 15:24-26. In these verses Paul talks about the exact theme of the kingdom of God

and the end of death. He says in verse 25, Christ must reign in the kingdom until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. Verse 24, then comes the end when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. That would be the two dimensions of the kingdom of God, Christ reigns for the first dimension after which he abolishes death, and then He hands the kingdom over to the Father for the second dimension of the kingdom where there is no death. So the real parallel passage is these earlier verses and what Paul is teaching in vv 50-57 is that at the end of Christ's reign in the kingdom there will be believers who are living and they will have to be changed into resurrection bodies so they can enter the eternal dimension of the kingdom that is imperishable. That is when death is defeated and that is more than 1000 years after any timing of the rapture of the church, they are not even close. Now this change of these believers is said to take place at the **last trumpet**. And I'm going to argue that **last** really means **last**. Somewhere or another people got off of accepting that the word last really means last. The reason is because they identified this as a rapture passage before they even thought it might not refer to the rapture at all. So people said, well, I believe in the pre-trib rapture so the last trumpet must be the last trumpet of the Church Age like in 1 Thess 4:16. Other people said I believe in the mid-trib rapture so the last trumpet must be the last of the seven trumpet judgments in Rev 11:15. Other people said I believe in the post-trib rapture so the last trumpet must be the one in Matt 24:3. Actually, none of those are the last. All there has to be is one trumpet blown after any one of those and at that point none of those are the last. And actually we know at least 1000 trumpets will sound after the post-trib trumpet in Matt 24:31 because Zech 14:16-19 explains that each and every year in the millennium the Feast of Booths will be held and the nations will have to go up. And at the Feast of Booths there are several trumpet blasts, the last one trumpet blast is called the *tekiah gedolah*. And in the last year of the millennial kingdom the *tekiah gedolah* will sound. In the end, there can be only one last trumpet and in this passage it is linked with the time when the saying comes about that death is swallowed up in victory. That does not occur until after the 1000 year kingdom of Christ whose last enemy to defeat according to verse 26 is "death." So the last trumpet must really be the last one. It will therefore sound after the millennial kingdom and not any time before. God says it is the last and I believe what God says, it is the last, there will be no more trumpet blasts period. That is literal.

So the passage teaches what must happen to the believers alive and dead at the end of the thousand year reign of Christ in order for them to inherit the eternal state. Now I'm going to give you all the details of why this is the only possibility. I tried every other possibility and none of them worked. I tried interpreting this as a pre-trib rapture passage, doesn't work, the pre-trib rapture is not when anyone inherits the kingdom, it's not when the last trumpet is blown, it's not when death ends. I tried a mid-trib rapture interpretation, it doesn't work for the exact same reasons pre-trib doesn't work. I tried a post-trib rapture interpretation and it's at least better than the other two because if you're a post-trib person you just throw out the millennium altogether and go into the eternal state. So it's far and away better than pre- or mid-trib interpretations. But its problem is it can't explain the passages that do describe a millennial reign of Christ, so it's out. I tried post-trib postmillennial and that's nothing more than optimistic post-trib amillennial so it has the same problems. In the end there's only one interpretation that can reconcile three inviolable truths in the context. First, whenever this trumpet is blown it really is the last trumpet. All other positions have other trumpets after them except post-trib and there simply cannot be another trumpet blast or it would become the last trumpet. Second, whenever this trumpet is blown death is defeated forever, nobody can ever die again, not one person ever. If they can then the saying could not come about that is written at this time "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory." Third, whenever the last trumpet is blown and these people are changed, the imperishable state begins and that reinforces the second point because the Greek word imperishable means no corruption, no decay, no death. There is only one time when these three things Paul says will happen, actually happen, and that is after the thousand year's kingdom of Christ but before the eternal kingdom of God. There are no other possibilities if you're going to be honest to the text. If you want to play games with the text, that's another issue, you can go waste your time, but if you really want to know what God is saying there are no other possibilities and I invite you to go through them all yourself and trot out the contradictions you create by manipulating the text. But if you want to humbly submit yourself to the word of God you'll see there is no other possibility, the text locks you down.

It's interesting, in verse 51 the text tells us that this truth is **a mystery**. The Greek **mystery** is *musterion*, it's used 27 times in the NT, 21 of the 27 are

used by Paul. The word means something now revealed that had never been revealed before. And so the something now revealed that had never been revealed before was how the saints in the millennium would get over into the eternal state. We know they would live to the very end but how they got over to the eternal state is never taught anywhere in the Bible other than right here. Never, nowhere. This is the only passage that teaches us this and so if we didn't have this passage the most we could say is their resurrection was implied.

In fact, this is what some have already said. In 1986, Louis A. Barbieri, assistant professor of Bible exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary, had this to say in an Essay dedicated to Dwight Pentecost. He was writing about the millennial saints, those believers at the end of the thousand years and what happens to them when the present heavens and earth is burned up with fire in preparation for the creation of the new heavens and new earth. And he's talking about the juncture in between and he says, "Although the Bible does not say what will happen to these people while this process is taking place, it is reasonable to conclude that they will experience a "rapture" into the heavenly city, Jerusalem. In order for these people to enter the heavenly city, they must experience a change from human bodies to glorified bodies." In 1986 he says there is no passage in the Bible that says what will happen to them. What I'm presenting to you is an interpretation that has been hammered out in recent years. Bob Wilkin saw problems with this being a rapture passage and presented an alternative interpretation a few years ago, Joseph Dillow has included the interpretation I'm giving you in his updated version of *Reign of the Servant Kings*. But I think it's interesting that Barbieri got the right answer as to what must happen to the millennial saints back in 1986, they must be changed. But today there are expositors who are recognizing that 1 Cor 15:50-57 directly teaches this. It's not the rapture of the church. The reason it had not been identified before is simply because people have been trained to read it as the rapture of the Church and so they came pre-disposed to the text. But Scripture has to be interpreted in context, read freshly and not through colored glasses. Once we read it this way we see clearly this is not the rapture. A mystery truth is revealed here, what happens to millennial saints after the millennium so that they can get over into the eternal state? They must be changed. So we're not jettisoning the pre-trib rapture, we're only pointing out another truth the Bible teaches; i.e. saints living at the end of the millennium must undergo a rapture-like

change into resurrection bodies so they can inherit the imperishable eternal state.

Having laid out my conclusions let me show you the evidences for these conclusions. Verse 50, **Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor can the perishable inherit the imperishable.** Let's observe. The first observation is that this is parallelism, **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God** is parallel to **nor can the perishable inherit the imperishable.** They are synonymous parallelism meaning they mean essentially the same thing. **Flesh and blood** refers to our natural, earthly bodies. **Perishable** also refers to our natural, earthly bodies that are corruptible, decaying. That's easy enough. Paul says they **cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor can they inherit the imperishable.** So it should be obvious that non-resurrected people cannot **inherit the kingdom of God** which is equivalent to **the imperishable** state.

What does it mean to **inherit**? The Greek verb *kleronomeo* means just what it means in English when we say inherit, we mean we come "to acquire some possession, to obtain ownership" of something, usually in the context of a family member dying and leaving us an inheritance. That's what it means in Greek too. It means "to obtain ownership in the imperishable kingdom of God." It does not mean "to enter" the kingdom of God. "Enter" is a different word in the Greek, *eiserchomai*, it just means what it sounds like, "to move into a space, to enter." And there are passages that talk about entering the kingdom of God. Jesus told Nicodemus, you must be born again to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5). But entering the kingdom and inheriting the kingdom are not the same thing anymore than entering a house and inheriting a house are the same thing. One simply means that you move into the space of the house by a door, the other means you have obtained possession and ownership of the house. So it is an entirely different thing to enter the kingdom of God than it is to inherit the kingdom of God. All who are born again will enter the kingdom of God but only those born again who learn to live by the Spirit and advance to maturity will inherit the kingdom. Inheriting the kingdom is therefore a reward reserved for a subset of believers. All enter, not all inherit. Paul taught this earlier in 1 Cor 6:9-10 and I taught you this and you can go back and listen to the details but quickly, Paul says, "do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" It would be ridiculous for Paul to say don't you know



unbelievers won't inherit the kingdom? Of course they knew that. But what they may not have known was that Christians whose lives were characterized by unrighteous behavior would not inherit the kingdom, which is Paul's point. Christians whose lives are characterized by unrighteous living will not inherit the kingdom of God. Of course they will enter the kingdom but that is a very different thing. To inherit means to obtain so that you come into possession of the kingdom, to enter just means that you go into it. So what does it specifically mean to inherit the kingdom? What advantage does that give a believer? It gives him the right to rule over a certain sphere in the kingdom. Christ as the King of kings is going to distribute rulerships to the believers who lived righteous lives as a reward so they have ownership in the kingdom. Those who enter will enjoy the blessings of the kingdom but they will not rule. Clearly Paul taught that not all believers inherit and that many of the Corinthians were in danger of not inheriting unless they stopped living carnal lives. That's the whole point of 1 Corinthians and if you don't get that you missed the entire point of the book. The theme of the book is that believers whose lives are characterized by unrighteous living will not inherit the kingdom. Therefore we ought to live righteous lives.

Now there is no problem in 1 Cor 6:9 because the kingdom of God is here a clear reference to the time beginning when Christ returns to earth to establish His one thousand year kingdom. By that time believers will have been raptured, resurrected and taken to the judgment seat of Christ to be rewarded. If the believer built on the foundation of Jesus Christ with wood, hay and straw, all things of the flesh, then we will not receive rewards but he will enter the kingdom. If the believer built on the foundation of Jesus Christ with gold, silver and precious stones, all things of the Spirit of God, then he will receive rewards and inherit the kingdom, meaning we will rule with Christ in the one thousand year kingdom. There is no problem because it has been known since OT times that people in resurrection bodies could inherit the kingdom. That was no mystery. But what about flesh and blood? Can flesh and blood bodies inherit the kingdom? We know in fact that flesh and blood bodies can inherit the one thousand year dimension of the kingdom so 1 Cor 15:50, **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God** cannot refer to that dimension of the kingdom, it must refer to the eternal state.

Let's think about this, on the day of the pre-trib rapture Church saints will be raised. But what about those who are left behind? All those who weren't

believers and have to remain behind and go into that terrible time of the day of the Lord which is the wrath of God and the anti-Christ will come on the scene with a ten nation confederation and make his treaty with the nation Israel starting the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel and by the mid-point he breaks his treaty by committing the abomination of desolation and he turns against Israel to annihilate them. During that time there will be many, many people from the nation Israel and from the Nations that come to Christ. The anti-Christ and his followers are going to persecute them heavily. Israel of course, but those from the Nations who aid Israel are also going to be putting their lives at risk for helping them. So you've got these believers during that time after the rapture, some die and some survive. You've also got unbelievers who die and some survive. So when Christ returns and defeats the anti-Christ and his armies you've got believers and unbelievers still alive on the earth and something has to be done because no unbelievers can even enter the kingdom. Jesus said you must be born again to enter the kingdom. But here we have Christ returned and there are believers and unbelievers. So how do you get down only to believers? You have a judgment to divide the believers from the unbelievers. Dan 12 talks about a 75 day interval between His return and the establishment of the kingdom. Matt 25 records the judgment on living Israel and Nations during that 75 day interval. Matt 25 records the two judgments. Turn to Matt 25. Matt 25:1-30 gives two parables that describe the importance of Israel being prepared with salvation so that when Christ returns they can enter the kingdom. Ezek 20:34-38 describes this same judgment. Christ will take Israel somewhere outside the land and kill all the unbelievers and take the believers into the land to enjoy the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. Matt 25:31-46 records the judgment on all the living of the Nations which is called the Sheep/Goats Judgment. Verse 31, "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates sheep from the goats; 33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" And there you see the sheep on His right hand, those from among the Nations who are in flesh and blood bodies and Jesus says they are going to inherit the kingdom. He goes on to explain why; the bottom line is during the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel they helped the Jews. So the sheep are believers who built on the foundation of Jesus

Christ by doing good works and thus they will be rewarded by inheriting the kingdom.

But the problem you see is how you get this verse together with 1 Cor 15:50. This one says flesh and blood shall inherit the kingdom and they will repopulate the nations in the kingdom. The other says flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom. How do you reconcile these two passages? The answer is that the kingdom of God in Matt 25:34 is talking about the first stage of the kingdom, Christ's 1000 year reign and 1 Cor 15:50 is talking about the second stage of the kingdom of God, the imperishable, eternal state. Stage one is not imperishable, it is perishable and Christ must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be abolished is death. Since there will be believers who will go into the kingdom in mortal flesh and blood bodies to repopulate the kingdom they will go in with sin natures. This means they will be subject to death during that stage of the kingdom, although their lives will be greatly improved due to the environment and the food, so they will have greater longevity, but they can still die and some of them will die. But those are the believers Matt 25:34 is referring to. 1 Cor 15:50, on the other hand, is referring to those believers who inherited the kingdom in Matt 25:34 and their offspring who live to the end of the thousand year stage of the kingdom and then what has to happen to them so they can get over into the eternal state because flesh and blood cannot inherit that dimension of the kingdom of God. That's Paul's point in 1 Cor 15:50 and so Matt 25:34 and 1 Cor 15:50 reconcile easily when we realize there are two dimensions of the kingdom, one perishable for a thousand years and one imperishable for eternity.

Both interestingly are referred to in the OT as the new heavens and the new earth. Turn back to Isaiah 65:17 because this shows you that there was an ambiguity in Isaiah's day concerning the new heaven and new earth. God revealed to Isaiah that He was going to create a new heavens and new earth. Let's look at it through Isaiah's eyes. Forget anything you think you know about the new heavens and new earth and just look from Isaiah's standpoint. "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind. 18 But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing And her people for gladness. 19 I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people; And there will no longer be heard in her The voice of weeping and the sound of

crying. 20No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, Or an old man who does not live out his days;” It sounds pretty good, it sounds like this is the eternal state, except verse 20, “For the youth will die at the age of one hundred And the one who misses the mark will not reach the age of one hundred, He will be accursed.” The Hebrew says “misses the mark” and there will be those who miss the mark, those who do not believe during the one thousand year kingdom and they will die. So according to this passage there are people who die in the new heavens and the new earth. They die at age 100. So you see the conditions are much better, low infant mortality rate, low death rate, longevity is increased, but, there is death for the one who misses the mark at age 100. In other words, Christ will give each person born in the kingdom 100 years to believe and on their one hundredth birthday, if they’ve not believed they’ll be executed. And this is all under the rubric of the new heaven and the new earth. So for Isaiah it’s sort of a blend of what we now know clearly as stage one, the thousand year kingdom, and stage two, the eternal kingdom. In the NT we have more revelation, passages like 1 Cor 15:23-26 and especially Rev 20 where it gives the duration of stage one as 1,000 years and Rev 21 which talks about the eternal dimension of the kingdom and calls that dimension alone the new heaven and new earth and says then there will be no more death and no more pain, no more suffering and He will wipe away every tear. But it wasn’t all divided up like that for Isaiah. For him both phases were the new heaven and the new earth. So what the Book of Revelation gives us is progressive revelation that refines Isaiah by carefully dividing the 1000 year kingdom where there is death from the eternal kingdom of God where there is no death. 1 Cor 15:50 is talking about what happens to those believers in the juncture between the two dimensions of the kingdom and we’ll have to pick up and do more next week. But this is not a rapture passage. It’s simply saying the believers at the end of the thousand year kingdom in flesh and blood bodies can’t inherit the eternal state, they must be changed. And they will not all sleep but they will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, the very last, the last trumpet of all time and then will come about the saying that “DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory.” And that will be a day indeed.

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