

God's Gracious Covenant With Israel: The Foundation For Worldwide National Covenanting #31 (Pt. 19)

1 Corinthians 15:42-44

June 20, 2010

Rev. Greg L. Price

The Full Preterist would have us believe that there will be no future resurrection of the physical body for all believers who have died in Christ. Rather the Full Preterist would have us believe that our physical body will remain in the grave, and that God will rather create a new immaterial, spiritual body instead at the time of our death. The Full Preterist redefines a bodily resurrection for believers to mean the re-creation of an altogether new immaterial, spiritual body. We noted in the previous sermon that such a view contradicts that very language and terms used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 when he compares the physical and material resurrection of Christ's body with that of believers in Christ. Just as Christ died physically and rose again physically with a glorified body according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3,4), so likewise shall all believers in Christ who have died physically be raised again physically with glorified bodies like Christ's (1 Corinthians 15:12).

Paul's very argument in 1 Corinthians 15 hinges upon the physical resurrection of Christ's body as the pattern and nature for the future physical resurrection of the bodies of all those who have died in Christ. Christ's material and physical resurrection of the same body that was laid in the grave absolutely guarantees the material and physical resurrection from the dead of our own same body that shall die and shall be laid in the grave (albeit a glorified body like Christ's that is incorruptible and imperishable). For that reason, Christ and His physical resurrection from the dead is identified as "the first fruits" of our own resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20,23). In the Old Testament offerings, the "first fruits" offering of a portion of the harvest was not different in substance from

that of the full harvest that followed it. It was simply an offering that signified that the whole harvest that followed belonged to God and was God's gracious blessing to His people. So likewise, in 1 Corinthians 15, Christ, "the first fruits" guarantees that the full harvest of believers to follow will enjoy the blessedness of a physical resurrection like unto Christ's. I refer you back to the previous sermon for a fuller exposition and discussion of the passage.

We now turn to a couple more questions to be answered from our text in 1 Corinthians 15. (1) What is the "order" of the resurrection referred to in 1 Corinthians 15:23? (2) What is the "spiritual body" referred to in 1 Corinthians 15:44?

I. What is the "order" of the resurrection referred to in 1 Corinthians 15:23?

A. In 1 Corinthians 15:23, there is an order specified by Paul in the resurrection leading up to the second coming of Christ at the end: (1) "Christ, the first fruits"; (2) "afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." In other words, according to Paul, there are not continuous resurrections at the point of each believer's death throughout this age (as the Full Preterist claims). Look closely at the text. To the contrary, there is Christ's physical resurrection as "the first fruits", and then there is a general physical resurrection of all believers together at the very time of Christ's second coming.

B. Those Full Preterists contradict the Scripture who at this point allege that Christ is NOT the one and only "first fruits" from the dead, but is rather simply the first among the first fruits from the dead. In other

words, there are first fruits resurrections besides that of Christ according to Full Preterists.

1. I submit that such Full Preterists blatantly add to Christ, who alone is stated to be “the first fruits”, the alleged first fruits “resurrection” of the Old Testament saints that supposedly received their newly created immaterial, spiritual bodies immediately after Christ’s resurrection, and the alleged first fruits “resurrection” of all those in Christ that had died after the resurrection of Christ until 70 a.d. who also allegedly received their newly created immaterial, spiritual bodies at the time of the purported second coming of Christ when Jerusalem was destroyed. Thus, according to Full Preterists, even though Paul only specifies that Christ is the “first fruits” (in 1 Corinthians 15:20,23), he really meant that there were two other first fruit “resurrections” (which are not really resurrections of the same body at all, but rather re-creations of new immaterial, spiritual bodies of believers).

2. I submit that Full Preterists not only have no scriptural warrant from the text for such a view, but clearly the text provides contrary scriptural warrant for this novel view. Full Preterists blasphemously share the unique messianic title that belongs to Christ alone as “the first fruits” with mere men saved by the grace of God, whereas Paul states that Christ is “the first fruits”, and all the dead in Christ are the full harvest to follow. Just as the messianic title, “the first born from the dead”, uniquely belongs to Christ (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5) and is not to be shared with any believer in Christ, so likewise the theologically equivalent title, “the first fruits”, uniquely belongs to Christ and is not to be shared with any believer in Christ.

C. Moreover, Full Preterists greatly err in another respect when they seek to use the words of Paul here in 1 Corinthians 15:23, “But every man in his own order”, to refer NOT to two and only two resurrection events, namely, (1) Christ’s physical resurrection, and (2) the physical

resurrection of all believers simultaneously at the second coming of Christ, but rather to refer to a “resurrection” (or rather re-creation) of a new immaterial, spiritual body every single time a believer dies (which as you can imagine would mean millions of separate, individual “resurrection” events throughout history). The Holy Spirit speaks of only two resurrection events in history where those who are raised from the dead are physically raised never to physically die again: Christ’s resurrection and the resurrection of all the dead in Christ at His second coming. Every other resurrection performed by Christ during His earthly ministry, or performed by the prophets, or the apostles meant that the dead who were physically raised had to undergo physical death once again. But that is what makes these two resurrection events unique from all the rest: Christ was physically raised from the dead never to physically die again; and all the dead in Christ (without exception) will be physically raised from the dead at Christ’s second coming never to physically die again.

1. It seems to me that the Full Preterist finds himself in an interpretive pickle at this point. For he must either find in the words of Paul, “But every man in his own order”, one new “resurrection” after another every time a believer dies (involving millions of “resurrection” events throughout history which as I said is clearly contrary to what Paul states in 1 Corinthians 15:23); or if he denies millions of “resurrection” events, he must affirm that all believers were “resurrected” who will ever be “resurrected” at the time of Christ’s alleged second coming in 70 a.d., which would mean that after 70 a.d. there are no more “resurrections” for believers, which would mean that we (along with millions of others) missed out on our “resurrection” because we were born and will die in Christ after 70 a.d.

2. But as we have noted in the previous two sermons, the Full Preterist has still not avoided the same heretical conclusion that their position makes our faith in Christ vain and empty by taking the **first**

option of millions of “resurrection” events (or re-creations) happening one at a time throughout history over the **second option** of no “resurrection” events (or re-creations) happening after 70 a.d. For in the final analysis, the Full Preterist still consigns the physical, material bodies of all believers to the grave forever and ever (i.e. the Full Preterist still denies the physical, material resurrection of the body to all the dead in Christ), which according to Paul means that Christ Himself was not physically raised from the dead, which means that Christ did not accomplish our redemption, which means we are still in our sins and our faith in Christ is vain and empty (1 Corinthians 15:16,17). Dear ones, to assert millions of re-creations of new immaterial, spiritual bodies successively throughout history is NOT AND NEVER CAN BE a physical resurrection of the same body that died. Therefore, the Full Preterist still denies the resurrection of the dead as preached and taught by Paul as absolutely necessary to our redemption. One million, one billion, or even one trillion re-creations of new material, spiritual bodies for believers throughout history still equals no physical resurrection of the body for any believer. And that, my friends, is the heresy of Full Preterism.

3. Let me conclude this point by noting that Roman Catholicism also denies the clear teaching of the Holy Spirit here in 1 Corinthians 15:23 of only two such resurrection events in history when they exalt Mary to have had a physical resurrection from the dead (like that of Christ’s own resurrection) before her body saw corruption—an alleged physical resurrection distinct and separate from the physical resurrection of all the dead in Christ.

‘Finally the Immaculate Virgin, preserved from all stain or original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and conqueror of death.’ The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin is a singular participation in her Son’s Resurrection and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 274).

Thus, Mary's alleged resurrection without any biblical warrant and even contrary to the biblical warrant found here in 1 Corinthians 15:23 means that Rome has likewise altered the words of Paul so that there are three resurrection events in history where the dead are raised never to die again: Christ, Mary, and all the dead in Christ at Christ's second coming.

4. But it is not only Rome that alters the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:23, all Premillennialists likewise depart from the words of Paul as well. For they likewise have at least three resurrection events (or more) rather than the two stated by Paul: The resurrection of Christ, the resurrection of the dead in Christ before the millennium, and the resurrection of the dead in Christ after the millennium (i.e. the resurrection of those who died in Christ during the millennium will be raised from the after the millennium). No, dear ones, there are only two resurrection events in the order laid out by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:23 (not three, not four, not millions of resurrection events): (1) Christ's physical resurrection, and (2) the resurrection of all the dead in Christ at His second coming, which is a postmillennial coming and not a premillennial coming of Christ.

II. What is the "spiritual body" referred to in 1 Corinthians 15:44?

A. Paul having revealed in the first half of 1 Corinthians 15 (verses 1-34) the damnable consequences for all the dead in Christ if the dead in Christ are not physically raised from the dead (just as Christ was), Paul reveals in the second half of 1 Corinthians 15 (beginning with verse 35) what kind of body the resurrection body shall be, "But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come" (1 Corinthians 15:35)?

B. Full Preterists (as we have noted many times before) do not believe in the physical resurrection of the same body that was laid in the

grave (except in the case of Christ's resurrection). For every other believer that is "resurrected" (or better re-created), the physical body remains in the grave never to be resurrected, and the Lord creates a new immaterial, spiritual body for the believer at death. The Full Preterist maintains that this is what Paul means when he states that the body of the believer will be a "spiritual body" as opposed to the "natural body" that has died in 1 Corinthians 15:44.

C. Let us consider then what a "spiritual body" is with which the dead in Christ are raised.

1. First of all, let us be clear that it is a "body" (sōma in Greek). In the context of 1 Corinthians 15, does Paul ever refer to a "body" (sōma) as being immaterial? Let's see. There are ten uses of the word "body" (sōma) in 1 Corinthians 15 (eight of which do not use the adjective "spiritual" with it). In all eight of those uses of the word "body" (sōma) without the adjective "spiritual", not one refers to an immaterial body, whether it be the "body" of the seed that sprouts into a plant (in 1 Corinthians 15:37,38) or whether it be earthly "bodies" of man and animals which have different kinds of flesh (in 1 Corinthians 15:39,40), or whether it be heavenly "bodies" of the sun, moon, and stars (in 1 Corinthians 15:40,41), or whether it be the "natural body" of man as used in (1 Corinthians 15:44). In all of these examples, not one use of the word "body" (sōma) means a body that is immaterial or non-physical; in fact, an immaterial body is a contradiction in terms. If it is a body with which the dead in Christ are raised, then it must be of a material, physical nature, like that of Christ's own resurrected body as we see in Luke 24:36-39 which was "flesh and bones" (see also John 2:18-22 and John 20:24-29).

2. Second, note the contrast that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 15:44 between the "natural body" and the "spiritual body".

a. When Paul speaks of the “natural body”, it literally means the “soulish body” (from the Greek word *psuchikón*, which is derived from *psuchē* meaning “soul”), and when Paul speaks of the “spiritual body”, he uses the Greek word *pneumatikón* (from *pneuma* meaning “spirit”).

b. So what is the “soulish body” in 1 Corinthians 15:44 as opposed to the “spiritual body”? The “soulish body” is one that is fit for this present earthly life, whereas the “spiritual body” is one that is fit for that future heavenly life (note that the contrast continues in 1 Corinthians 15:45-49 which gives further explanation). The “soulish body” is earthy and is fit for earthly existence, while the “spiritual body” is heavenly and is fit for heavenly existence. The “soulish body” is likened to Adam’s earthly body, whereas the “spiritual body” is likened to Christ’s resurrected body, which He Himself said was flesh (though an imperishable and incorruptible flesh).

c. If Full Preterists want to make the word “spiritual” (as used with a “spiritual body”) mean that which is immaterial, non-physical, or that which is not flesh because the word “spiritual” comes from the word “spirit” which is contrary to the substance of flesh, then I submit they must also in all consistency make the word “soulish” (as used with a “soulish body”) to mean that which is immaterial, non-physical, or that which is not flesh because “soulish” comes from the word “soul” which is also contrary to the substance of flesh. Dear ones, Paul clearly means to distinguish a natural body of flesh that is corruptible and perishable (i.e. a soulish body) from a resurrected body of flesh that is not corruptible and perishable (i.e. a spiritual body).

d. In fact, the word “spiritual” does not mean that which is immaterial or non-physical as we see from other uses of the term, but rather means that which is given or supplied by the Holy Spirit as in 1 Corinthians 10:3,4. There Paul states that the children of Israel were given “spiritual food” to satisfy their hunger and “spiritual drink” to

satisfy their thirst from a “spiritual rock”. Now the food they ate was not immaterial or non-physical because it was “spiritual food”, nor was the water they drank immaterial or non-physical because it was “spiritual drink”, nor was the rock from which the water came immaterial or non-physical because it was a “spiritual rock”. The resurrection body of the dead in Christ is spiritual in the sense that is given by the Holy Spirit as a blessing to God’s people, just as the food, drink, and rock were spiritual in the sense that they were given by the Holy Spirit as a blessing to God’s people. But even more to the point, when Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:14,15 contrasts the “natural man” (literally, the “soulish man”; this is the same Greek word for “soulish” as was used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:44) with “he that is spiritual” (this is the same Greek word for “spiritual” as was used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:44), the contrast is not between a man that is physical and of flesh (i.e. the “natural man” or soulish man) and a man that is non-physical and is not of flesh (i.e. the “spiritual” man). To the contrary, the contrast is between a man whose life is worldly and earthly whose citizenship is limited to this world, and a man whose life has been transformed and made anew by the Holy Spirit whose citizenship is in heaven. And likewise, dear ones, the resurrected body of the dead in Christ is not immaterial or non-physical simply because it is stated to be spiritual, but is rather a glorious body of flesh that has been transformed by the Holy Spirit.

D. But does not the analogy of the seed (in 1 Corinthians 15:36-38) that is planted and dies and becomes a plant, a vine, a bush, or a tree illustrate what Full Preterists teach about the body of flesh dying and remaining in the grave while a new body comes forth to clothe the spirit or soul of the believer? Absolutely not!

1. First, Paul is simply teaching that just as the seed that is buried undergoes a change from the appearance of a seed to that of a plant, so the body of the Christian undergoes a change from the

appearance of a mortal, perishable body to that of an immortal, imperishable body (or from that of a “natural body” to that of a “spiritual body”, or from that of an earthly body to that of a heavenly body). The analogy of the seed is used to illustrate the truth that these vile bodies of ours will be changed and transformed into the likeness of Christ’s glorious resurrected body (Philippians 3:21). Paul is simply teaching the glory of the fully grown tree is quite different from that of the seed from which it came, and so likewise the glory of the resurrected body of flesh (that cannot die) is quite different from the body of flesh that was laid in the grave. Thus, Paul’s analogy of the seed in no way proves or supports the view of the Full Preterist. For the Full Preterist does not teach that the spiritual body comes from the natural body as the tree comes from the seed, but rather the Full Preterist teaches that the spiritual body is an altogether new creation of God. For the Full Preterist to find support for their false teaching, Paul would have had to use some illustration of one seed being planted in the ground and remaining in the ground while a new plant is created above the ground that comes not from the seed that was buried in the ground.

2. Second, is it not abundantly apparent that the analogy of the seed is not teaching that the plant that comes from the seed is an immaterial, non-physical plant, but is rather a material, physical plant whose glory and beauty is evident in its new qualities? And so likewise, dear ones, the corruptible body of flesh that is laid in the ground is likewise raised a glorified, incorruptible, material, and physical body of flesh (having the same DNA as the body that was laid in the ground).

E. But doesn’t Paul also say that “flesh and blood” cannot inherit the eternal kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:50)?

1. Yes, he teaches precisely that by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But what does it mean? Paul clarifies the meaning of “flesh and

blood” in the same verse when he states, “neither doth corruption inherit incorruption” (1 Corinthians 15:50).

2. In other words, “flesh and blood” is equivalent to the term “corruption” and is parallel to that which we have already seen Paul use earlier in verse 44: the “natural body” (or “soulish body”). Just as the “natural body” is corruptible so is the body of “flesh and blood.” The natural body fit for this perishable earth below must be changed, transformed, and glorified at the resurrection into a spiritual body fit for that imperishable heaven above. But as to whether the spiritual body of believers that is resurrected is a body of flesh that is made fit for heaven, all we have to do is to look not to the Virgin Mary and her alleged resurrection, but to the Lord Jesus Christ alone whose resurrected, spiritual, glorified body that was fit for heaven was stated by the Lord Himself to be of “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39).

In closing the Full Preterist asks, “How is it possible that the flesh of believers whose bodies have been eaten and eliminated by wild beasts or have been consumed by fire or have corrupted in the grave can be reunited to form their resurrection bodies?” But dear ones, such a question presupposes a disbelief in God and a skepticism of His power to do that which is impossible to man (Matthew 19:26; Luke 1:37). The same rebuke of Christ issued to the Saducees who did not believe in the bodily resurrection of believers also applies to the Full Preterist, “Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God” (Matthew 22:29). Is it more difficult to create that which does not exist out of nothing and to speak that which does not exist into existence, or to gather together once again that which already exists but is spread over the face of the earth in the smallest microscopic particles? The God who created all things by the word of His power will have no difficulty in restoring the cells and DNA of each Christian into the same body of flesh (though a glorified body of flesh).

And dear ones, if you can believe and lay hold of such a wonderful promise is this, how is it that your faith cannot lay hold on God's promises that relate to you daily needs in this life? If God will do the greater by the His almighty power and through His infinite love for you who are trusting in Christ alone for your eternal salvation (namely, raise your vile bodies from the grave), surely He will do the lesser in providing for all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Beloved, when your faith dwindles and you sinfully question whether God will supply the work you need to glorify Him, will supply the health you need to glorify Him, will supply the housing you need to glorify Him, will supply the food you need to glorify Him, or will supply every grace you need to overcome temptation and to walk in faithful and loving obedience to Christ's commands, by God's grace look in faith to the empty tomb and Christ's bodily resurrection, and then by God's grace look in hope to your own empty tomb and your bodily resurrection on that last day. And remember if Christ is raised and if you shall be raised because He is raised, then everything else you need in this life to glorify Him is yours through faith in Christ as well. If the greatest is yours by God's undeserved grace, then so is the least yours by that same grace.

Copyright 2010 Greg L. Price. Distributed by Still Waters Revival Books (<http://www.swrb.com>) by permission of the author, Greg L. Price. More free online written Reformation resources by Greg Price (John Calvin, John Knox, Samuel Rutherford, *et al.*) are at <http://www.swrb.com/newslett/newslett.htm> and more free audio (MP3) Reformation resources by Greg Price (and many other Puritans, Covenanters, and Reformers) are at <http://www.sermonaudio.com/go/699> or at <http://www.sermonaudio.com/swrb>.