

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Final Victory

*So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:54-57, KJV 1900)*

Paul uses a simple analogy to teach a truth that our finite minds cannot grasp. To "put on" something implies the simple act of getting dressed, of "putting on" your clothes in the morning. For folks who, like some in Corinth, deny a literal bodily resurrection, this analogy presents a dilemma. On what do you "put" incorruption and immortality at the Second Coming and our resurrection? Unless you remain alive at that day, your soul long ago entered glory and will then have no need to be changed. The lesson simply enriches the reality that Paul has taught from the beginning of this chapter. When the Lord raises our bodies at the Second Coming, they shall be the same body in which we lived, but it shall be a changed body. That which was formerly corruptible shall then be changed so that it is incorruptible. That which was formerly mortal shall then be changed so that it is immortal.

The word "corruptible" indicates something that is subject to corruption, not necessarily something that is already wholly corrupt. In this context, Paul is not teaching the doctrine of the new birth and its powerful effect on the body of the child of grace. He is specifically teaching us about the effect of the resurrection on the body of the regenerated, born again, child of grace. In the new birth, God creates a new nature within us. (2 Corinthians 5:17) He does not alter the physical body. However, the soul or spirit so changed in the new birth has the ability to exercise a powerful influence over the sinful nature that is associated with our bodies. The body of the born again person remains subject to corruption, corruption that occurs when the regenerated person chooses to ignore or to "quench," a Bible word (1 Thessalonians 5:19), the Spirit of God indwelling us and to allow that sinful, corrupt disposition to control our thoughts and actions. In this sense, the body of the regenerated person after regeneration remains "corruptible." Depending on our choice either to walk by faith and live the godly life that honors the Lord or to ignore the Holy Spirit's convicting light, we may use our body to glorify God (1 Corinthians 6:20) or to serve sin, corruption. (Romans 6:12-18) In the Romans 6 context, Paul fully develops the need for every believer to take control of his life, including the

physical body, which he describes there as an instrument, a tool, or a weapon that we either yield to Satan for his use or to God for His use. This potential for corruption is, I believe, Paul's intent in our study passage. If Paul were describing the physical body of the unregenerate person, he would not describe it as merely "corruptible," but as wholly corrupted. The point of the lesson addresses the child of grace who presently lives with this conflict, a conflict that ultimately always manifests itself in some action of his physical body. When the Lord raises our bodies out of death and into His eternal glorious presence, they shall be changed bodies. The corruptibility that we lived with, the conflict with which we struggled in this life, shall be ended. That same body shall be as wholly changed into His glorious moral and spiritual image (Romans 8:29-30) as our inner being was changed into that image in the new birth. We shall have no conflict between righteousness and sin, between using that body as a weapon in Satan's hands or in God's hands. Our body then shall be wholly changed, glorified and equipped only to glorify God.

Among folks who generally think they believe in God's grace you will observe two conflicting ways of viewing the individual person after the new birth. Historically, the term "Total depravity" originated in the Calvin-Arminius conflict, Arminius following earlier teachers who held to the idea that the fall of man in the Garden of Eden was partial, that at the least the human will remains unchanged by the fall. Based on this false premise, Arminius and his followers held that fallen, unregenerated man is competent and capable of exercising his unfallen will, choosing to change his future, and effect his own new birth by using his unfallen will. On this point, Calvin and his followers held that the fall corrupted all of man. Man in all his component parts, including his will, fell and, prior to the new birth, is presently wholly incapable of doing anything of himself to contribute anything to his new birth. This is the teaching of Scripture on the transformation effected by the new birth. In Ephesians 2:1-9, Paul emphasizes that, prior to God's work of grace, we were dead in trespasses and sins. "Total depravity" therefore was not used to teach that every unregenerate sinner acts as

wickedly as he is capable of acting, but rather that man in all of his nature and attributes was corrupted by the fall.

Within the "Camp" of those who hold to salvation by grace you will encounter some folks who hold that, even after the new birth, we remain "Totally depraved." This idea utterly contradicts the Bible doctrine of the new birth and its profound effect on the person so changed. It will often lead to a wholly fatalistic idea that, if we remain totally depraved after the new birth, we are **only** capable of sin, and therefore any act of righteousness that we perform is wholly orchestrated by God. According to this view, the regenerated person is fully as sinful as the unregenerate, and as incapable of doing righteousness as the unregenerate; he is nothing more than a puppet on the strings of the cosmic puppeteer. This idea contradicts every passage in the Bible that commands the regenerated child of God to take control of his life and to use his body actively as an "instrument" (As in the Romans 6 context mentioned above) for God in the righteous warfare against sin and Satan. It contradicts Paul's clear instructions to the Corinthians to "...glorify God **in your body**, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Corinthians 6:20) If you remain wholly or "Totally depraved" after regeneration, you cannot and would not desire at all to glorify God.

The majority of folks who hold to Biblical grace in God's eternal saving purpose believe that the new birth effects a powerful change within the person born again, a change that enables the child of grace to overrule the physical body and to use it to "...glorify God" or as an instrument of righteousness unto God, "...as those that are alive from the dead."

While we presently struggle in conflict, we may control our body and use it to God's glory, but we never get far from the realization that we are also subject to the "corruption" of sin if we do not so yield or actively choose to use our body to God and for His glory.

Paul's point in our study passage gives us reason to rejoice at the thought of our literal bodily resurrection. The body that remained linked to our sinful nature, even after regeneration, shall come out of the grave so changed as to be wholly and eternally "incorruptible." It shall be not only not corrupt, but it shall then be immune, wholly so, from corruption, "incorruptible."

*...and this mortal shall have put on immortality.* Mortality refers to our being presently subject to death. That God shall raise our bodies out of death witnesses that we are presently wholly subject to death. We are mortal. A hymn writer penned the thought, "The moment that our lives begin we all begin to die." When the Lord raises our bodies from death at the Second Coming, we shall be immortal, no longer subject to death. Our life shall endure with God and in joyful fellowship with Him for endless eternity.

*...then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?* From beginning to end, Scripture points us to a grand day when God shall utterly crush all of His enemies and secure for His beloved and chosen people a final and eternal victory. Paul associates that final victory with the resurrection at the Second Coming. He personifies cruel death as God's and our adversary, but he also personifies death as defeated. When death presently claims a loved one, we feel the sting of death, and we are helpless to reverse its claim. Likely, if we approach our own death in a way that leaves us conscious of its coming, we shall feel the sting then as well. Although I am in reasonably good health, I have reached the age to realize that my body is no longer capable of doing things that I did without hesitation in my younger years. The degenerative process is advancing. I can't stop it. I may slow it down or delay it by good diet and exercise, but I can't reverse it or stop its process. Like you, I shall only realize victory over death, my arch-adversary, when the Lord returns and raises me from death to His eternal glory. On that day, death shall lose all of its sting and victory. Death shall be utterly defeated. All the stings that we felt through a lifetime as we experienced the loss of one loved one after another to death shall be neutralized.

*The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.* When God warned Adam of the certain penalty for violating that first simple law, the penalty He named was death. While Adam suffered an immediate loss of friendly relationship with God, he did not die a physical death on that day. However, the seed of death was planted that day, leaving the final outcome certain.

*But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Our victory over sin and death shall not be celebrated as a joint venture between God and us. God alone is responsible for our deliverance from sin that shall culminate in our resurrection. As Adam suffered an immediate death to his former friendly relationship with God, actually experiencing physical death many years later, even so the child of grace experiences in the new birth a certain deliverance from sin, though the actual and full experience of that deliverance shall only occur at the Second Coming and resurrection. When the Lord permitted John to look into glory, he witnessed what you and I shall experience fully on that day. (Revelation 5:9) Notice the joint themes, "Thou art worthy...for thou has redeemed us." Thank you, Lord, for victory!

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Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor