

# *The Life Promised and Manifested*

## *Part 1: Introduction (from Dying to the Resurrection)*

by William Ramey

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The Scriptures proclaim that when Jesus Christ returns, He will raise from the dead those who are His on “the last day”<sup>1</sup> of this present age with an imperishable, spiritual body and subsequently clothes it with immortality.<sup>2</sup> The nature of the resurrected imperishable<sup>3</sup> body is spiritual and its duration after being clothed with immortality is without qualification.<sup>4</sup>

“Imperishability” and “immortality” are not synonymous terms, for each specifies a differing profound and permanent effect on the resurrected body. First, the body is initially resurrected as imperishable. In context, the Apostle Paul further explains what this transformation entails and that what is raised is not a physical body, but an imperishable, spiritual body:

<sup>42</sup>“So also is the resurrection of the dead. [The body] is sown perishable, it [is] raised imperishable. <sup>43</sup>It is sown in humiliation, it is raised in splendor;<sup>5</sup> it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.” <sup>44</sup>It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual.” (1 Cor. 15:42-44).

The resurrected body is not able to suffer from any degenerating capacities of any kind; rather it is raised a spiritual body with splendor and power.<sup>6</sup>

Subsequent to being transformed into a spiritual, imperishable entity, the resurrected body is clothed with immortality. Of the three occurrences of “immortality” in the New Testament, two of them are attested in 1 Corinthians 15:53-55:

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<sup>1</sup> Many times Scripture states that Jesus Christ will raise the dead “on the last day” (Jn. 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24; see also Dan. 12:13) which coincides with His coming (1 Thess. 1:10; 4:13-18; 2 Thess. 2:1), Kingdom (1 Cor. 15:23; Phil. 3:20-21; 2 Tim. 4:1) and subsequent judgment (Matt. 16:27; 25:31ff.).

<sup>2</sup> The Greek noun for “immortality” is ἀθανασία (*athanasia*; 1 Cor. 15:53, 54; 1 Tim. 6:16†) and its corresponding adjective is ἀθάνατος (*athanatos*; not attested in the New Testament).

<sup>3</sup> The Greek noun for “imperishability” is ἀφθαρσία (*aphtharsia*; Rom. 2:7; 1 Cor. 15:42, 50, 53, 54; Eph. 6:24; 2 Tim. 1:10†) and its corresponding adjective (“imperishable”) is ἀφθαρτος (*aphthartos*; Rom. 1:23; 1 Cor. 9:25; 15:52; 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 Pet. 1:4, 23; 3:4†).

<sup>4</sup> Temporal adjectives or adjectival phrases that indicate limited or unlimited duration never modify or qualify the substantive “immortality”.

<sup>5</sup> The antithesis “humiliation—splendor” corresponds more properly according to Greek usage than “dishonor—glory” (NASB, NIV, KJV; cf. Phil. 3:21).

<sup>6</sup> What Satan desired to produce in man—death—has been overthrown. In God’s goodness and wisdom, man becomes more vigorous and productive after death by virtue of the resurrection from the dead!

<sup>53</sup>“For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup>But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’”

Paul explains that only after the body is raised imperishable, it is subsequently clothed with immortality. It is important that the resurrected body is first made imperishable; for if it had been made immortal first, then the irreversible state of decay would have remained—perpetually.<sup>7</sup>

Just as imperishable is the opposite state of being perishable, so immortality is the opposite of being mortal. The resurrected body which is now imperishable is to put on like a new set of clothes, immortality. Whereas an imperishable body is incapable of decay in of itself, it still is not impervious to harm or even death from an external force. However, once the imperishable body is also clothed with immortality, it becomes absolutely and wholly harm and death proof.

The two-fold process that the resurrected body experiences is dynamic. From humiliation and degeneration, it is transformed by Christ’s splendor and power. From vulnerability, it is catapulted to the fixed state of incapable of dying—impervious from all internal and external destructive forces. This resurrection in all of its glory is not a physical resurrection, but a bodily, spiritual one. It is not a restoration to physical life; it is an introduction into a new kind and type of life which transforms the very bodily existence. What a glorious realization when our bodies will be redeemed from weakness, pain, decay and death.

Paul specifies that the resurrected body is first raised imperishable and then clothed with immortality. However, the temporal specification between being raised imperishable and when the body is in fact clothed with immortality is understood by comparing 1 Corinthians 15.22-26 and verse 42 with verses 51-55.

“<sup>22</sup>For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. <sup>23</sup>But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, <sup>24</sup>then the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. <sup>25</sup>For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. <sup>26</sup>The last enemy that will be abolished is death.”

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<sup>7</sup>This is probably the reason the LORD God mercifully drove the man and woman out of the Garden before they had eaten from the Tree of Life (Gen. 3:22); for if they had eaten from the Tree of Life, it would have had made them immortal, and therefore permanently solidified their decaying-death state.

“<sup>51</sup>Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, <sup>52</sup>in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. <sup>53</sup>For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup>But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ <sup>55</sup>‘O death, where is your victory?’ ‘O death, where is your sting?’”

The time at which those who are Christ’s are raised from the dead is specified at His coming (1 Cor. 15:22-23). It is significant that twice Paul states the body is raised imperishable (1 Cor. 15:42, 52) without the slightest hint that the body will also be clothed simultaneously with immortality. The reason is because only at the end of Christ’s reign when the last enemy is abolished, which is death, that immortality is bestowed. Verses 54 and 55 are particularly illuminating in this regard. These verses are quoted again; however, this time three words are capitalized to bring out their full force in the overall temporal sequence:

<sup>54</sup>”But WHEN this perishable will have put on the imperishable (when Christ comes; vv. 23, 42, 52), AND this mortal will have put on immortality (when Christ has abolished death; vv. 25-27), THEN will come about the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’ (Isaiah 25:8). <sup>55</sup>‘O death, where is your victory?’ ‘O death, where is your sting (Hosea 13:14)?”

Although all the dead who belong to Christ are raised imperishable when He returns, it is not until the end of His reign that the relevant Scriptures are fulfilled; for immortality has been bestowed because Christ has abolished the last enemy, which is death. Just as those who are Christ’s received simultaneously an imperishable, spiritual resurrected body at the beginning of His Kingdom, so they will be subsequently clothed also with immortality at the consummation of His Kingdom.

One of the consummative results of Christ’s effectual reign is that all those who belong to Him will be clothed with immortality after He “has subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him (including the last enemy to be abolished which is death), so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28). This is not without enormous significance; for now, God alone possesses immortality (1 Tim. 6:16).<sup>8</sup> We are properly outfitted to coexist with God and He to dwell in our midst, and to endure the intense heat that will dissolve the old heavens at which time God creates the New Heavens and the New Earth (2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 21:1-8).

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<sup>8</sup> This is the third and final occurrence of “immortality” in the New Testament (see 1 Cor. 15:53, 54).

The Hebrew prophets wrote about a resurrection from the dead of God's people (Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 36:22—37:28; Dan. 12:2, 13). However, it is evident that they did not know the kind or quality of that resurrected body, because neither term “imperishability” or “immortality” corresponds to a word or expression in the Hebrew Scriptures—whether pertaining to the resurrected body or anything else.<sup>9</sup> It is not until Paul we learn that those who are raised when Christ returns will be raised with an imperishable body, and that there is a time interval until being clothed with immortality—and that not until the end of His reign.

Although the prophets of old never wrote concerning the imperishability or immortality of the resurrected body, a very special kind of life is spoken of, “everlasting life”, which Paul declares in his salutation to Titus (1:1-4).

“<sup>1</sup>Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, [writes] for [the] faith of [the] chosen of God and [the] knowledge of truth that produces godliness, <sup>2</sup>on the basis of [the] hope of everlasting life, which God, Who cannot lie, promised very long time ago, <sup>3</sup>but now at the proper time manifested the message in the proclamation which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior. <sup>4</sup>To Titus, my genuine child in a common faith: grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.”

Many people without realizing it make the semantic error of equating the expression “everlasting life” with that of “imperishability” or “immortality”. However, Paul says that God promised in the past “everlasting life”. Where in the Hebrew Scriptures is this promised if neither term “imperishability” or “immortality” is used? Either Paul is mistaken, or else he is referring to something else other than “imperishability” or “immortality” when he wrote to Titus concerning the “everlasting life which God, Who cannot lie, promised very long time ago.”

In Romans 2:7, Paul uses “imperishability” and the expression “everlasting life” in the same verse that in context makes them mutually exclusive concepts, and therefore, not semantic equivalents. Throughout his *Epistle to the Romans*, Paul only directly addresses “to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called saints” (Rom. 1:7a), comprising of both Jews and Greeks. If one traces Paul's argumentation from Romans 1:8 through 2:6, it is clear that the personal and possessive pronouns, “you” and “your” respectively, can only refer to those

<sup>9</sup> The noun ἀφθαρσία, however, occurs in the LXX apocryphal writings (Wisdom 2:23; 6:19; 4 Maccabees 9:22; 17:22), and its adjective ἀφθαρτος (Wisdom 12:1; 18:4).

addressed in Romans 1:7a. For clarity sake, the entire context of Romans 2:7 is quoted, beginning with Romans 2:1 and extending through verse 11.

“<sup>1</sup>Therefore you have no excuse, O man, all the ones judging, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. <sup>2</sup>And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. <sup>3</sup>But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? <sup>4</sup>Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? <sup>5</sup>But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, <sup>6</sup>Who will recompense to each person according to his deeds: <sup>7</sup>to those who by perseverance in doing good work, seeking for glory and honor and imperishability (*aphtharsian*), everlasting life (*zōēn aiōnion*); <sup>8</sup>but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, [God will recompense] wrath and indignation. <sup>9</sup>[There will be] tribulation and distress for every life of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, <sup>10</sup>but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>11</sup>For there is no partiality with God.”

In addition to the orthographical differences between “everlasting life” (*zōēn aiōnion*) and “imperishability” (*aphtharsian*), which should cause a little suspicion that they are two different concepts, “imperishability”<sup>10</sup> is included in a list with two other attributes which those “who are beloved of God in Rome” are to seek: “glory” and “honor”.<sup>11</sup> In return, God recompenses “everlasting life”.<sup>12</sup> Logically, therefore, what God recompenses (“everlasting life”) cannot be semantically equated with only one of the attributes (“imperishability”) while disregarding the other two attributes (“glory” and “honor”) as if Paul did not say them.

<sup>10</sup> Most English translations incorrectly render the Greek noun ἀφθαρσία (*aphtharsian*) as “immortality”. As we have already discovered in 1 Corinthians 15:53-54 where both terms “imperishability” and “immortality” are used, they cannot be substituted for one another.

<sup>11</sup> It is not by coincidence that Paul uses the attributes, “glory”, “honor” and “imperishability” in Romans 2:7, for the concepts are also found in 1 Corinthians 15:42-55 where Paul speaks about the resurrection. Those who by perseverance in doing good deeds are those longing for the resurrection from the dead when they will be properly rewarded as taught by our Lord in Luke 14:12-14.

<sup>12</sup> “Eternal life” (v. 7), “wrath” and “indignation” (v. 8) are the compound direct objects of the verb “recompense” (ἀποδίδωμι/apodidōmi; v. 6). “Glory”, “honor” and “imperishability” are the compound direct objects of the participle “seeking” (ζητέω/zēteō; v. 7). “By perseverance in doing good work” (v. 7) specifies the manner in which the “seeking” is performed.

Let us use a simple mathematical formula to help us clarify the matter.

$$1 + 5 + 7 = 13$$

Thirteen is the sum by adding the three numbers 1, 5 and 7 together. Although our addition may not always be perfect, we certainly would know the sum would be incorrect if only one of the numbers on the left hand side of the equation would be the same as the sum when all three numbers were added together:

$$1 + 5 + 7 = 7$$

Let us now substitute Paul's three attributes from Romans 2:7, "glory", "honor" and "imperishability", along with its "sum" in a like fashion:

$$\text{"glory"} + \text{"honor"} + \text{"imperishability"} = \text{"everlasting life"}$$

Paul's statement cannot be rationally read and understood as:

$$\text{"glory"} + \text{"honor"} + \text{"imperishability"} = \text{"imperishability"} (= \text{"everlasting life"})$$

And yet, this is the manner in which many theologians, seminary and Bible College professors, pastors and Sunday school teachers have dogmatically taught for untold centuries. It is no small wonder then that those in the pew also mistakenly believe that "imperishability" is the same as "everlasting life"!

If then the term "imperishability" cannot be an alternative for the expression "everlasting life", can "immortality" be semantically substituted for the expression "everlasting life"? Of the three instances of "immortality" in Scripture (and all located in Paul's letters [1 Cor. 15:53, 54; 1 Tim. 6:16]), not one passage uses the terms in close proximity with another, nor is there even a hint in Scripture that they are understood as identical. As with "imperishability", "immortality" does not occur in the Hebrew Scriptures to which Paul was alluding to in Titus 1:2 when he wrote: "[the] hope of everlasting life, which God, Who cannot lie, promised long time ago". Once again, if "everlasting life" is to be equated with "immortality", then where is "immortality" promised by God in the Hebrew Scriptures?

The answer is that God never promised "immortality" or "imperishability" in the Hebrew Scriptures because it was to be a part of a "mystery" revealed at a later time concerning the qualities associated with the resurrected body. This "mystery" is revealed to God's people by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:51-55:

<sup>51</sup>Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed,  
<sup>52</sup>in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will

sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. <sup>53</sup>For it is necessary this perishable must be clothed with imperishable, and this mortal clothed with immortality. <sup>54</sup>But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and when this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’. <sup>55</sup>‘O death, where is your victory?’ ‘O death, where is your sting.’”

A “mystery”<sup>13</sup> is a technical term in the New Testament. A mystery embodies unrevealed information to the Hebrew prophets,<sup>14</sup> but revealed to the New Testament apostles and prophets.<sup>15</sup> It is information hidden or concealed, and only because of divine revelation is it made known. There are several mysteries that have been revealed by God to the apostles and prophets,<sup>16</sup> and the content of these mysteries are eschatological in nature.

The content of the mystery revealed in 1 Corinthians 15:51-55 is that those who are alive at the time of the resurrection will not undergo physical death before the resurrection, but bodily transformed imperishable in “a moment” of time<sup>17</sup> at the “last trumpet” (cf. Rev. 11:15-19) and subsequently clothed with “immortality”. The resurrection had been taught by the Hebrew prophets, but the fact that those who are Christ’s are to be raised at the instant of Christ’s return without passing through death and join the resurrected dead in the presence of Christ is revealed for the first time through the Apostle Paul.

Of paramount importance at this juncture is that this mystery reveals that the bodily resurrection incorporates both qualities of imperishability and immortality that had not been revealed to the Hebrew prophets. Therefore, “everlasting life” cannot refer to the attributes of the resurrected body in this regard.

Another passage of Scripture that relates to the same event as described in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17. Paul addresses the

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<sup>13</sup> Of the twenty-eight instances of “mystery” (μυστήριον/*mystērion*) in the New Testament, twenty-two occur in the Pauline epistles. Therefore, it is safe to state that Paul received more divine revelation concerning the mysteries and disclosed them than any other New Testament author.

<sup>14</sup> There is not a Hebrew word equivalent to the New Testament usage. This suggests that in Israel’s ritual, everyone partaking in its ceremonies could understand its meaning. God has His secrets (Deut. 29:29), but those He revealed to the nation of Israel, He revealed to all (Deut. 6:7; Neh. 8:1-4).

<sup>15</sup> Rom. 16:25-26; 1 Cor. 4:1; Eph. 3:1-5; Col. 1:25-26.

<sup>16</sup> Matt. 13:11; Mk. 4:11; Lk. 8:10; Rom. 11:25; 1 Cor. 2:1, 7; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; 15:51-55; Eph. 1:9; 3:3-9; 5:25-32; 6:19; Col. 1:24-27; 2 Thess. 2:7; 1 Tim. 3:9, 16; Rev. 10:7; 17:5, 7.

<sup>17</sup> The change or transformation will be instantaneous (ἐν ἀτόμῳ; τέμνω, “I cut”, with alpha privative), denoting that which is indivisible, i.e., in the smallest conceivable moment of time. The resurrection of all those who are Christ’s will take place in the smallest amount of time. Ponder the enormous power that will be displayed by Christ—from death to an imperishable, spiritual body with splendor and power.

Thessalonians' concern about the destiny of those who died before the coming of Christ. They had expected that Christ would return within their lifetime; but He has not—now what? Paul reassures them they need not sorrow as do others who have no hope.

“<sup>13</sup>But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. <sup>14</sup>For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. <sup>15</sup>For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup>For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of [the] archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup>Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.”

Having settled the matter that “everlasting life” is not synonymous with either “imperishability” or “immortality”, the question still remains: what Hebrew Scripture was Paul referring to in Titus 1:2 when he refers to “[the] hope of everlasting life” which God promised very long time ago? In the next part of our discussion of *The Life Promised and Manifested (Part 2): Those Who Will Awake*, this question will be further examined.

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