

## The Body

But someone will say, “How are the dead raised? What kind of body will they have when they come?” <sup>36</sup> Foolish one! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. <sup>37</sup> And as for what you sow—you are not sowing the future body, but only a seed, perhaps of wheat or another grain. <sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body as He wants, and to each of the seeds its own body. <sup>39</sup> Not all flesh is the same flesh; there is one flesh for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. <sup>40</sup> There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is different from that of the earthly ones. <sup>41</sup> There is a splendor of the sun, another of the moon, and another of the stars; for one star differs from another star in splendor. <sup>42</sup> So it is with the resurrection of the dead:

Sown in corruption, raised in incorruption;

<sup>43</sup> sown in dishonor, raised in glory;

sown in weakness, raised in power;

<sup>44</sup> sown a natural body, raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. <sup>45</sup> So it is written: **The first man Adam became a living being;** <sup>e</sup> the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit. <sup>46</sup> However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, then the spiritual.

<sup>47</sup> The first man was from the earth  
and made of dust;  
the second man is from heaven.

<sup>48</sup> Like the man made of dust,  
so are those who are made of dust;  
like the heavenly man,  
so are those who are heavenly.

<sup>49</sup> And just as we have borne  
the image of the man made of dust,  
we will also bear  
the image of the heavenly man. 1 Corinthians 15:35-49

## Implications...

- We do not merge into a “greater consciousness” we will be unique, individual beings... v.38

*But God gives it a body as He wants, and to each of the seeds its own body. v. 38*

- We will be different from how we are now though...
  - Few pounds lighter?
  - Less wrinkles?
  - On the road to Damascus the followers of Christ didn't realize they were speaking with the Resurrected Christ & they had been with him for hours!
  - Yet, when Jesus appeared to Thomas, He still had the scars from his crucifixion.
- We will be....
  - Unique.
  - Special.
  - Death & Disease will have no power.
  - More beautiful.
    - What is planted looks far different than what grows.
      - Tulip bulbs are ugly, tulips are pretty.
      - We are not a RECONSTRUCTION of our current body, we are a new CREATION.
  - No more pain, hunger, etc.
  - Physical limitations will be no more.

## Jesus' Resurrected Body...

- Able to walk through locked doors
- Appeared & disappeared (moved quickly from place to place)
  - Uber will be obsolete in heaven!
- Was physical
  - Able to touch
  - Able to be touched
  - Able to eat
  - Bore the scars of the Crucifixion.
- Will it be the same for us????
  - Yes.

*Like the man made of dust,  
so are those who are made of dust;  
like the heavenly man,  
so are those who are heavenly. V.48*

- I believe we will recognize those in heaven who we knew on Earth.
  - Our relationships will be different though.
    - No Marriage in heaven
    - But still a deep love for each other...and the other Believers in Heaven. AGAPE love.
- But all of this happens when we are in God's presence & not before...

*Sown in corruption, raised in incorruption;  
<sup>43</sup> sown in dishonor, raised in glory;  
sown in weakness, raised in power;  
<sup>44</sup> sown a natural body, raised a spiritual body.*

## **Eternal Life comes after death.**

- Physically we will change before our "new" bodies will be complete.
  - For many Christians a physical death will occur
    - With Christ though we know that the best is yet to come! Therefore....
    - The NT often refers to our physical death as "Sleep."
  - Our loved one who had Alzheimers now is of sound mind.
  - Cancer is no more
  - Age will have no affect anymore.
  - Heart problems, back pain, bad knees?
    - Not anymore!
  - I was talking with a lady this week who was missing her loved one. She had passed several years ago..
    - We do not grieve as those who have no hope! (1 Thess. 4)
  - Use our bodies to glorify God!

## **Eternal Life comes after death.**

### The “Down Side”

- We will have bodies that can enjoy the benefits & pleasures of Heaven. Of worshipping our Lord & being together with other Believers for all eternity!
- We will have bodies that can endure the torment of hell for all eternity. Of being separated from our Lord & endure the pain of a place that was not originally intended for us, Christ’s most prized creation...

But we must not be so pre-occupied with physical resurrection that we miss the spiritual one...

- Spiritually we must DIE to self before we can be made a new in Christ.
  - Even though (v.43f) he is speaking of a physical death & then transformation we can see how aptly describes what should happen in our Spiritual transformation!
    - As a NEW CREATION! NEW BELIEVERS with a transformed soul. We were dead in our sins & now we are alive in CHRIST!

*And you were dead in your trespasses and sins<sup>2</sup> in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world...<sup>4</sup> But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love that He had for us,<sup>5</sup> made us alive with the Messiah even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! Ephesians 2:1-2,4-5*

## **Eternal Life comes after death.**

## How Are the Dead Raised? (1 Cor. 15:35–48)

Being philosophers, the Greeks reasoned that the resurrection of the human body was an impossibility. After all, when the body turned to dust, it became soil from which other bodies derived nourishment. In short, the food that we eat is a part of the elements of the bodies of generations long gone. When the body of the founder of Rhode Island, Roger Williams, was disinterred, it was discovered that the roots of a nearby apple tree had grown through the coffin. To some degree, the people who ate the apples partook of his body. At the resurrection, then, who will claim the various elements?

Paul's reply to this kind of reasoning was very blunt: "You fool!" Then he made the important point that *resurrection is not reconstruction*. Nowhere does the Bible teach that, at the resurrection, God will "put together the pieces" and return to us our former bodies. There is *continuity* (it is *our* body), but there is not *identity* (it is not the *same* body).

Paul knew that such miracles cannot be explained, so he used three analogies to make the doctrine clear.

**Seeds (vv. 35–38, 42–48).** When you sow seed, you do not expect that same seed to come up at the harvest. The seed dies, but from that death there comes life. (See John 12:23–28 for our Lord's use of this same analogy.) You may sow a few grains of wheat, but you will have many grains when the plant matures. Are they the same grains that were planted? No, but there is still continuity. You do not sow wheat and harvest barley.

Furthermore, what comes up at the harvest is usually more beautiful than what was planted. This is especially true of tulips. Few things are as ugly as a tulip bulb, yet it produces a beautiful flower. If at the resurrection, all God did was to put us back together again, there would be no improvement. Furthermore, flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom. The only way we can enjoy the glory of heaven is to have a body suited to that environment.

Paul discussed the details of this marvelous change in 1 Corinthians 15:42–48. The body is sown (in burial) in corruption, because it is going to decay; but it is raised with such a nature that it cannot decay. There is no decay or death in heaven. It is buried in humility (in spite of the cosmetic skill of the mortician); but it is raised in glory. In burial, the body is weak; but in resurrection, the body has power. We shall be like Jesus Christ!

Today, we have a "natural body," that is, a body suited to an earthly environment. We received this body from our first parent, Adam: he was made of dust, and so are we (Gen. 2:7). But the resurrection body is suited to a spiritual environment. In His resurrection body, Jesus was able to move quickly from place to place, and even walk through locked doors; yet He was also able to eat food, and His disciples were able to touch Him and feel Him (Luke 24:33–43; John 20:19–29).

The point Paul was making was simply this: The resurrection body completes the work of redemption and gives to us the image of the Saviour. We are made in the image of God as far as personality is concerned, but in the image of Adam as far as the body is concerned. One day we shall bear the image of the Saviour when we share in His glory.

First Corinthians 15:46 states an important biblical principle: first the "natural" (earthly), and then the "spiritual" (heavenly). The first birth gives us that which is natural, but the second birth gives us that which is spiritual. God rejects the first birth, the natural, and says, "You must be born again!" He rejected Cain and chose Abel. He rejected Abraham's firstborn, Ishmael, and

chose Isaac, the second-born. He rejected Esau and chose Jacob. If we depend on our first birth, we shall be condemned forever; but if we experience the new birth, we shall be blessed forever.

**Flesh (v. 39).** Paul anticipated here the discovery of science that the cell structure of different kinds of animals is different; and therefore, you cannot breed various species indiscriminately. The human body has a nature of one kind, while animals, birds, and fish have their own particular kind of flesh. The conclusion is this: If God is able to make different kinds of bodies for men, animals, birds, and fish, why can He not make a different kind of body for us at the resurrection? (Pet lovers take note: Paul did not teach here that animals will be resurrected. He only used them as an example.)

**Heavenly bodies (vv. 40–41).** Not only are there earthly bodies, but there are also heavenly bodies; and they differ from one another. In fact, the heavenly bodies differ from each other in glory as far as the human eye is concerned. Paul is suggesting here that believer may differ from believer in glory, even though all Christians will have glorified bodies. Every cup in heaven will be filled, but some cups will be bigger than others, because of the faithfulness and sacrifice of those saints when they were on earth.

These illustrations may not answer every question that we have about the resurrection body, but they do give us the assurances that we need. God will give to us a glorified body suited to the new life in heaven. It will be as unlike our present body in quality as the glory of the sun is unlike a mushroom in the cellar. We will use this new body to serve and glorify God for all eternity.

We must remember that this discussion was not written by Paul merely to satisfy the curiosity of believers. He had some practical points to get across, and he made them very clear in 1 Corinthians 15:29–34. If we really believe in the resurrection of the body, then we will use our bodies today to the glory of God (1 Cor. 6:9–14).

Finally, the lost will be given bodies suited to their environment in hell. They will suffer forever in darkness and pain (Matt. 25:41; 2 Thes. 1:7–10; Rev. 20:11–15). It behooves us who are saved to seek to rescue them from judgment! “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:11).

If you have never trusted the Saviour, do so now—before it is too late!<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. The nature of the resurrection body (15:35–50)

The glorious future to which Paul has been referring earlier in the chapter virtually beggars all human understanding, let alone description. Faced with such an immense hope, mortal men can resort only to very basic questions: ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?’ (35). Paul answers this very understandable question in the ensuing verses: through them all runs one fundamental principle: *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God* (50). These

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<sup>1</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [\*The Bible exposition commentary\*](#) (Vol. 1, pp. 620–621). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

physical bodies of ours simply are incapable of coping with the glory of God. If we are going to be resurrected in Christ, we need also to be transformed into his likeness. Only Christ-like people will be suitable for such a quality of life. Yet, however radical and total such a transformation must inevitably be, due to the vulnerability of our present bodies, there is nevertheless a clear continuity between Christians now and Christians then: 'we shall be raised', not destroyed and reincarnated in a different existence altogether. This continuity guarantees the fulfilment of such natural desires as being able to recognize and enjoy those whom we have known here in this life, when we have come to share in the life of the world to come.

Paul illustrates from nature this continuity-cum-transformation (36–41). Jesus had himself used a similar picture to describe the absolute necessity of his own death, if there was to be any such reality as resurrection: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.' Thus, the Creator has written into nature the principle of resurrection: without death and burial there is no new life. At present the whole creation is in bondage to the endless cycle of birth-life-age-death-birth, *etc.* (what Paul calls 'decay'). The raising of Lazarus<sup>49</sup> is an illustration of such life: he was raised from the dead, only to die again. Jesus, through his resurrection to an indestructible life, has broken out of this bondage to decay and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.<sup>51</sup> He died, was raised from the dead and will never die again. 'Much fruit' will result from his death and resurrection: he is the 'first fruits' of this bountiful harvest. So **there has to be death before life**, even in nature. What is sown in the ground will, however, re-appear in a different form altogether. By taking examples from different aspects of the created order (39–41), Paul shows that the Creator God is accustomed to producing many varied kinds of *bodies*. He thus ensures that each is specially suited to its own particular environment: a star will not function in the water, nor will a whale cope with the sky. Each is perfectly suited to its own location. In the same way our physical bodies, ideal for this earthly existence in spite of their mortality, will be useless in the perfection of God's kingdom. They need, therefore, to be buried when their work is done, so that from such raw material God can produce *a spiritual body* (44), perfectly suited for inheriting the kingdom of God.

**The contrast between** the *physical body* and the *spiritual body* is underlined in verses 42–49, particularly in the succession of phrases in verses 42–43. The totality of that contrast is indicated by using opposite epithets. Paul does not mean that there is no honour or power in our physical bodies, but that the very greatest honour and power inherent in these bodies could not begin to cope with life in the kingdom of God in all its fullness. The fundamental reason for this is their bondage to decay (42). There is no way in which this corruption can be halted; it can only be buried. Paul's choice of *glory* (*doxa*) and *power* (*dynamis*) in verse 43 to describe life in the kingdom of God evokes the ascription at the end of the Lord's Prayer: 'Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.' These two words summarize Paul's consistent vision of the consummation of God's kingdom.

Paul then returns to the contrast between Jesus and Adam (45–49). Again the perspective is of two humanities, each under its federal head. All human beings share in the characteristics of Adam. 'The LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.' Adam—and every human being—*was from the earth, a man of dust* (47). We have all *borne the image of the man of dust* (49). It is important to recognize that this was all by the fiat and express purpose of God, as the Genesis account makes

plain. *The last Adam*, Jesus, himself partook of flesh and blood, eventually being put to death and buried.

Everything that happened from that point onwards revealed the resurrection. From that point of no return he *became a life-giving spirit* (45); raised from the dead, he revealed his true origin as *the man ... from heaven* (47)—truly and fully man, not condemned to lie in the dust, but destined to resume his place at the right hand of God the Father. All those who belong to him will bear his image (49), both in the sense of being made like him and in the sense of sharing his resurrection-body. Indeed, it is probable that Paul's description of Jesus in these verses provides us with the only intelligible category for appreciating the nature of his resurrection-appearances prior to his ascension. He was recognizable as the crucified One, *i.e.* there was continuity with his past existence; but he was released into a quality of life unshackled by mortality and the finiteness of time and space, *i.e.* there was discontinuity. So the resurrected Jesus, indwelt by the Spirit of God, was able to give life in a new dimension to all who trusted him. What happened to Jesus after his death and resurrection will happen also to all those in Jesus when they are all together raised on the last day (*cf.* 51–53).

In the whole of this section, we are particularly hamstrung both by the limitations of English in rendering key Greek words, and by popular views of man which divide his nature into different parts (*e.g.* body, mind and spirit). The Greek word, *psychē*, often translated 'soul', is used by Paul to describe our natural physical existence as human beings. Paul here is contrasting the body which expresses this natural human life (44, *sōma psychikon*) with the body which will eventually express the supernatural life of God's Spirit in the fullness of his kingdom (*sōma pneumatikon*). Even now God's Spirit dwells in our mortal bodies: but the more the Spirit makes us like Jesus, the more these mortal bodies groan under the strain of anticipating their own demise and the freedom of totally new bodies designed for glory and power. Therefore the English words used in this section can bring more confusion than clarity. Perhaps the most helpful single clue is to note Paul's contrast between the bodies we have now for our natural human existence and the bodies we will be given when we enter into our full inheritance in heaven. The first body has all the limitations of our earthiness; the second body has all the capacity of God's Spirit. From this perspective it is obvious that the first body (*flesh and blood*) cannot inherit the kingdom of God, because decay and corruption cannot be part of what is eternally incorruptible (50).

In summary, we must acknowledge that in this whole discussion Paul is struggling to describe the indescribable. As Ladd says, 'Who can imagine a body without weakness? or infection? or tiredness? or sickness? or death? This is a body utterly unknown to earthly, historical experience.... it is an order of existence in which the "laws of nature" ... no longer obtain. In fact, when one puts his mind to it, it is quite unimaginable.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Prior, D. (1985). [\*The message of 1 Corinthians: life in the local church\*](#) (pp. 271–274). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.



### *Nature of the resurrection body (15:35–49)*

Paul has set forth the Resurrection of Christ as the grounds for belief in the resurrection of the Christian. He has also shown the disastrous consequences of rejecting the hope of resurrection. Now he turns to consider the question of the nature of the resurrection body.

Two questions open the discussion: “But someone may ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?’ ” (v. 35). The “someone” is probably an imagined opponent of the principle of resurrection. The first question intimates that resurrection is impossible; the second that it is inconceivable. The second question expands on and attempts to justify the first. Findlay paraphrases it: “In what bodily form do we picture the dead coming on the scene?” Paul’s answer is in four parts.

First, he illustrates from nature *the possibility of a resurrection body* (vv. 36–38). The mystery of the Resurrection should raise no question of the possibility of the Resurrection, for “the same mystery is wrapped up in every germinating seed” (Findlay). A person totally ignorant of farming, watching the farmer plant seed in the spring, might ask, “What sort of body can come from a dry grain that you drop into the earth to rot?” But the sower, having witnessed the process of quickening so frequently, would dismiss the questioner as a fool. Paul was arguing that the actuality of this lower type of “resurrection” vindicates the conceivability of the higher.

A few matters deserve comment. For instance, the pronoun “you” (v. 36), emphatic in the Greek, reminds the readers that Paul is referring to something familiar to them. Again, the verb translated “come to life” (v. 36; ASV “is ... quickened”) is passive, implying that the seed does not germinate and grow of itself but that it is acted on by an outside agent. That agent, the context suggests, is God. It is implied that the God who can quicken the lifeless seed can also quicken our mortal bodies. To deny this is to impugn the power and resources of the Creator. Moreover, the seed that is sown is different from that which grows out of it; “you do not plant the body that will be” (v. 37). From this it is to be inferred that the resurrection body, though having some sort of continuity with the present body, will be different from it. Finally, verse 38 sums up the principal teaching of this section: the resurrection body will be the body God is pleased to give us; just as He gives to each seed (think of it!) a body of its own, He will give to each believing person a body suitable for his or her redeemed self.

Second, Paul shows that God is capable of producing *various kinds of bodies* (vv. 39–41). There is in fact an amazing variety of bodies in God’s creation, and there is a fitness of each for that which it clothes. Why then should anyone think that there can be only one kind of human body, and that that body is the one known to this life? God can give us the kind of body we need.

Third, Paul teaches that the resurrected body will be *gloriously different* from the present body (vv. 42–46). Just as heavenly bodies (planets? angelic beings?) differ from earthly bodies, and as one star differs from another star, so the resurrection body will differ from the present earthly body. Paul’s purpose in making this statement was to show how groundless is the objection to the Resurrection that assumes that the resurrection body must be like the body of flesh and blood. Verses 42b–44 indicate, by means of a series of antitheses, some of the differences between the present body and the body that is to be.

This present body that is “sown [continuing the imagery of seed] is perishable”; that is to say, it is sown a perishable body, a body subject to disease, death, and decay. The body that is sown will be “raised imperishable.” That is, the resurrection body will be a body no longer subject to

dissolution and decay (v. 42b). The present body is sown “in dishonor,” lacking in attractiveness. The word suggests disability, perhaps disfigurement. Goodspeed renders it “humiliation.” The primary reference is to the body at the time of death and burial. At the end of this age it will be “raised in glory.” The basic meaning of “glory” is “splendor”; hence, it is interpreted by Hodge as “that resplendent brightness which diffuses light and awakens admiration” (cf. Phil. 3:21). In the present passage the idea may be “beauty” (v. 43a; cf. TCNT). Again, the body is “sown in weakness; it is raised in power” (v. 43b). Weakness marks the earthly body even in life; the primary reference here, however, is to the corpse. The weakness that belongs to the body in life “is perfected in death.” “Nothing is more absolutely powerless than a corpse—it can do nothing and it can resist nothing” (Hodge). In this context, “power” suggests that the resurrection body will possess faculties of which we now have no conception.

The final couplet, which serves to gather up all that has been said in this series of antitheses, affirms that what is sown is “a natural body” and what is raised is “a spiritual body” (v. 44a). “Natural” comes from *psychikon*, “pertaining to the soul.” Arndt and Gingrich explain that the term always denotes “the life of the natural world and whatever belongs to it, in contrast to the supernatural world.” A “natural” body is a body adapted to and expressive of the *psyche*, the rational principle of life. Goodspeed renders it “physical body.” Mrs. Montgomery has, “The body sown is animal.” The term essentially points up that the body we now have is suited to our present, earthly existence. A “spiritual body” is a body suited to a higher level of life; it is a body that expresses spirit and is adapted to a supernatural, spiritual environment.

In the last part of verse 44, Paul justifies his assertion about a “spiritual body,” an expression that at first may appear to be a contradiction in terms, almost the same as “immaterial matter.” In effect he says, if it is proper to speak of a “natural” body (i.e., a body suited to the *psyche*), it is also proper to speak of a “spiritual” body (i.e., a body suited to the needs of the spirit). If the one exists, the other does also. The TCNT says: “As surely as there is a human body, there is also a spiritual body.”

Verse 45 shows that what has been said about “natural” and “spiritual” bodies is in keeping with the teachings of the Scriptures. Picking up the ideas of “natural” (*psychikos*, pertaining to the soul) and “spiritual” (*pneumatikos*, pertaining to the spirit), Paul quotes a passage that represents Adam as having been created a “living soul”; he became a *psyche* and had a body adapted to it. He was created for an existence on this earth and was given a body suitable for such existence. The last Adam (Christ) became “a life-giving spirit.” Christ is the “last Adam” because He is the second representative Man, of whom Adam is said elsewhere to be the type or pattern (Rom. 5:14). Adam was, however, a creature possessing animal life and belonging to the natural order. Christ, on the other hand, though by His incarnation one of us, belongs to a higher order, is linked to the supernatural, the world of spirit. He has life in Himself, and can give that life to as many as He wishes (cf. John 5:21, 26).

Verse 46 does not simply teach that the natural body precedes the spiritual. Rather, it states a general principle: the natural (the lower, the imperfect) precedes the spiritual (the higher, the perfect). Our present, earthly state is preparatory to the eternal state. “The present life is like a seed time, the harvest is hereafter” (Hodge).

Fourth, Paul concludes that *the resurrection body will be a body like Christ’s* (vv. 47–49). The heart of these verses is found in the statement of verse 49: “And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.” The promise

contained in these words holds true, of course, only for those who have a vital union with Christ. But for them, the wearing of “His moral likeness here carries with it the wearing of His bodily likeness hereafter” (Findlay).<sup>3</sup>

VERSES 35–58 RESPOND to the potential objection that verse 35 notes. “How are the dead raised?” was probably not so much a genuine question but a way of mocking the whole notion of bodily resurrection. Paul’s reply again falls into three parts. Verses 36–44a provide analogies from the created world to describe the resurrection body. Verses 44b–49 argue for the need of a heavenly body from the existence of an earthly body. Verses 50–57 describe why such transformation is necessary. Paul then closes the chapter with commands to stand firm in true belief and action (v. 58).

The first analogy Paul uses to illustrate the resurrection body is that of seed and plant (cf. John 12:24, though Jesus’ point there is somewhat different). By being buried in the ground, the seed seemingly dies, and it certainly decomposes. Yet on that very spot new life emerges, totally different in appearance from the seed, and yet somehow the mature plant remains the same living entity (vv. 36–38). In fact, the world is filled with different kinds of bodies (v. 39—“flesh” here does not mean “sinful nature”) that God has created. So why should it be thought incredible that he could create still one more kind—a resurrected human body? So too the heavenly bodies—sun, moon, and stars—differ in nature and brilliance (v. 41). And an even greater gap exists between the earthly bodies, which all have certain identifiable features in common, and the heavenly bodies, which also resemble each other in certain aspects (v. 40).

Verses 42–44a make clear where Paul is going with all of these analogies. There yet await for the Corinthians resurrection bodies that will be far more glorious than their present ones. Unlike their current bodies, these new ones will be fitted for eternity, never again to die or be limited by sin or impotence (vv. 42–43). Whereas humans in this world are animated by merely physical life, believers will one day be fully empowered by the Spirit (v. 44a). The terms “natural” and “spiritual” in verse 44 use the identical language Paul has already used in 2:6–16 to indicate the difference between Christians and non-Christians. In this context, the contrast might better be indicated by translating the adjectives as “natural” and “supernatural.”

Verses 44b–49 pick up on widespread ancient speculation, in both Jewish and Greek circles, that there were two primal human beings, an earthly one and a heavenly one. Plato, for example, thought of all creation as a pale shadow of heavenly archetypes. Philo interpreted Genesis 1–3 allegorically and thought that God originally created two human men, one who lived on earth and rebelled (chaps. 2–3) and his perfect, heavenly counterpart (chap. 1). Paul agrees that there are two progenitors of humanity (v. 44b). But he makes Jesus the perfect

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<sup>3</sup> Vaughan, C., & Lea, T. D. (2002). [\*1 Corinthians\*](#) (pp. 159–162). Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press.

“Adam” (using the Hebrew play on words in which Adam means “man”) and stresses that he came *after* the first Adam (i.e., in Christ’s incarnation), not before (vv. 46–47).

So too believers who have shared in the finite, fallen likeness of the first Adam can look forward to sharing in the kind of perfect humanity Jesus embodied, but only after this life, when Jesus comes back again (vv. 48–49; the NIV footnote here [“so let us”] is less likely than the text [“so shall we”]). To make this point, Paul cites Genesis 2:7 and then uses it as a springboard for comparing the far more glorious humanity of Jesus, who not only has the breath of human life but is able to give eternal, spiritual sustenance to others (v. 45).

Verses 50–57 further unpack the need for bodily transformation. Frail, mortal humanity cannot survive in God’s eternal and perfectly holy presence. “Flesh and blood” in verse 50 was a stock idiom in Jewish circles for “a mere mortal” and does not contradict what Paul has already stressed, that resurrection experience is a bodily one (cf. Jesus’ reference to having “flesh and bones” in Luke 24:39). But it must be a body that is “imperishable” and “immortal” (vv. 52b–54a).

Verse 51 supplies more information about the time at which this transformation will take place. On the term “mystery,” see under 2:7 (pp. 63–64). The secret that Paul is revealing here is that believers’ bodily resurrections will occur when Christ returns. Not all Christians will die first, since some will be alive when he comes back. But all will undergo whatever transformation is necessary to give them their glorified bodies. This change will take place instantaneously not gradually. The trumpet (v. 52a) was a stock metaphor in biblical literature to herald the end (cf. Joel 2:1; Zech. 9:14; Matt. 24:31; 1 Thess. 4:16; and the seven trumpets of Rev. 8:2–9:14).

When all this has happened, then the way will be paved for the events of verses 24–28 to unfold. The climax of this series of events for believers is the destruction of death itself, as Isaiah had predicted (v. 54b, quoting Isa. 25:8). Paul breaks out into a rhapsody at the thought of this marvelous prospect, quoting and slightly adapting Hosea 13:14 (v. 55). And, as in Romans 6–8, he recalls that sin is the primary culprit that has led to both physical and spiritual death, while the law, apart from pointing people to Christ, serves only to promote sin, as it increases conscious rebellion against God’s standards (v. 56; cf. Gal. 3:19–24). But praise God that this deadly sequence has been interrupted by the victory over death God has wrought through the death and resurrection of Jesus (v. 57)!

Appropriately, Paul returns from these lofty flights of theological reflection to the practical implications for the Corinthians (v. 58). Since Christ has been raised bodily, they too will one day be physically transformed. Therefore they should remain unswervingly committed to orthodox theology and totally dedicated to the work of the gospel—the purity of living and the faithful exercise of their distinctive avenues of service. No matter what the cost in this life, they can count on the ultimate triumph of all God’s people and all his purposes.<sup>4</sup>

## Bridging Context

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<sup>4</sup> Blomberg, C. (1994). [\*1 Corinthians\*](#) (pp. 315–317). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

THE KEY THEME that permeates verses 35–58 is the simultaneous continuity and discontinuity between believers' earthly bodies and their resurrection bodies. Clearly, though, the stress remains on the latter. There is molecular continuity between seed and plant, but who would have guessed it were it not for the recurring cause and effect relationship between planting a seed and seeing new life sprout in the very place the seed was planted? So one may speak of some kind of ongoing personal identity between natural and spiritual bodies but anticipate substantial physical change.

Beyond this, Scripture offers few clues to answer our more detailed questions about what these new bodies will be like. We may hazard some guesses from what we know of Christ's resurrected body—it was tangible, it could eat but didn't have to, but it could also appear and disappear and pass through locked doors (Luke 24; John 20–21). Yet precisely because he had not yet ascended and been fully exalted and glorified, even Jesus' body as the Gospels describe it may not have been exactly what he ended up with. One could assume, for example, that he eventually no longer had any scars in his hands and side.

Some see the references to earthly and heavenly bodies in verse 40 as different from the examples given in verses 39 and 41. In that event, Paul may be giving additional analogies, thinking, for example, of the differences among the various earthly terrains (mountains, rivers, canyons, oceans) and among various kinds of supernatural creatures (angels, demons). But this seems unlikely in view of the framing verses that are surely meant to explain this particular text.

At any rate, there is no support at all here for a view, as in Mormonism, that distinguishes between kinds of heavenly bodies that believers will receive. The whole point in contrasting sun, moon, and stars is not to suggest three different kinds of resurrection bodies but to give further examples of how God can create different kinds of physical entities in general.

Verses 42–44a make plain that Paul is comparing and contrasting only *two* kinds of human bodies—those that live in this world and those that will live in the next. The attributes described in these verses are perhaps best epitomized in Revelation 21:4: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Verses 44b–49 respond to competing views about the afterlife. They affirm three crucial truths that must be preserved. First, a new body is a necessity for experiencing the world to come. Escape into an *eternally* disembodied state is not an option. Second, that new form of existence does not come until Christ's return. This refutes all claims by believers to having "arrived," spiritually speaking, in this life. Third, this new heavenly body will be far more glorious than anything we currently experience or imagine.

Verse 50 reminds us that our current sinful and mortal bodies are incapable and unworthy of coexisting with an infinite, holy God.

Verses 51–52 contain language and imagery that closely resembles 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, with its description of death as sleep and resurrection at the last trumpet. The latter passage contains the verse that has given rise to the notion of a "rapture" and spawned countless debates about "pre-," "mid-," or "post-tribulationism" (v. 17). Because of the close correlation between the two passages, and because Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 has been speaking exclusively of transformations occurring at the time of Christ's public return (v. 23), it is unnatural to think of the rapture of 1 Thessalonians as some separate, prior event. The use of

trumpet imagery with the Day of the Lord elsewhere in the Bible (see above, p. 317), and in Jewish thought more generally, reinforces this analysis. But again many texts of Scripture must be brought to bear on the debate; exegesis of 1 Corinthians alone will not solve the problems. And since all sides agree that no single passage ever discusses the rapture and the tribulation at the same time, it seems overly restrictive to insist that any one view of the relationship must be held if one is to participate in a certain church or Christian organization.

First Thessalonians 4:15 has also been said to contradict 1 Corinthians 15 by affirming that Paul initially believed that he would live until Christ's return, a view he betrays no knowledge of here and even more explicitly rejects in 2 Corinthians 1:8–11. Others are less certain which group Paul classifies himself with in verse 51. Often elaborate hypotheses about "development" in Paul's theology ensue. But all of this reads far too much into each of the texts. Grammatically, the phrase "we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:15) means simply "whichever Christians are still alive," and nowhere else does Paul unequivocally claim to know if he will be a part of this group of believers.

Verse 56, appearing as incidentally as it does, shows us that Paul's theology of the role of the Law in producing sin and death was not limited to the more polemical contexts of Galatians 3 or Philippians 3 nor merely the product of his later thinking, as in Romans 6–7. The very fact that it emerges so incidentally here testifies to its early, foundational role in Paul's thought. Presumably he has taught on the subject already in Corinth and, for once, can assume they still understand it. Increasing transgressions is not the sole purpose of the Law. Indeed Reformation theology has traditionally recognized three uses of the Law, the other two of which are far more positive—as a deterrent to sin and as a moral instruction for Christians. But the first one is an important use and supports in some measure the classic Lutheran dichotomy between law and gospel.

Given the Corinthians' tendency to divorce theology from ethics, Paul's conclusion (v. 58) remains telling. It is just like him to conclude his discussion with very practical applications. Here he reminds us that it is the resurrection hope, and only this hope, that keeps believers in every place and time from despair and helps them stay faithful in Christian service. In fact, the resurrection demonstrates four sweeping principles that affect all of life: truth is stronger than falsehood, good is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hatred, and life is stronger than death.<sup>5</sup>

## Contemporary Significance

THE NATURE OF THE resurrection body remains hotly debated, as Christians continue to try to wrest more detail from the Scriptures than is present in them.

One minority perspective argues that Christ's resurrection body, as the exemplar for our resurrection bodies, was normally invisible and immaterial, since most of the time during his forty days of appearances he was not present with the disciples. In other circles, some

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<sup>5</sup> Blomberg, C. (1994). [\*1 Corinthians\*](#) (pp. 317–320). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

Christians still continue to object to cremation,<sup>12</sup> as if God's power in reconstituting and transforming a believer's body were limited to situations in which the corpse was preserved relatively intact! Both debates distract attention from Paul's primary concern, which is to guard against an overly realized eschatology that leads to an overly triumphalist ecclesiology—that is, claiming for the present era too many of the blessings and victories of the age to come (see pp. 25–27 for explanation and illustrations).

If we are right in suspecting that this triumphalism reflected the attitudes and messages of the Corinthians claiming to speak under the Spirit's inspiration, then the most analogous dangers in our contemporary world surround those, particularly within the charismatic movement, who make overly inflated claims for the degree of spiritual maturity we can achieve in this life. Noncharismatic circles have their counterparts with teaching on Christian perfection and the possibility of going days, months, and even years without sinning. The "prosperity gospel" tricks people into thinking that they can have and deserve excessive health and wealth in this life. Against all of these trends, Paul insists that we haven't yet "arrived," nor will we arrive this side of Christ's return.

Conservative Christians unfortunately continue to debate the different positions on the millennium and rapture in divisive ways, though fortunately much of this is subsiding. Many parachurch organizations have come to recognize that neither doctrine is clear enough in Scripture to merit its inclusion in a statement of faith that their employees are required to affirm. Major exceptions usually involve educational or missionary organizations, whose institutional inertia brings change more slowly. The church can learn a good lesson from the parachurch movement and join in refusing to make pre-, post- or amillennialism, or pre-, mid- or posttribulationism a part of their doctrinal statements, tests of orthodoxy, or criteria of fellowship or of cooperation with other believers. Again, many of the larger, growing churches have already recognized this, but others still have a long way to go.

Although the NIV footnote for verse 49 ("so let us") is not as likely as the text ("so shall we"), it reminds us of the fact that because we will one day fully bear the image of Christ, who is the perfect reflection of God, we should encourage each other to work toward re-creating that image even now. Ephesians 4:24 describes this process as putting "on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

Contemporary Christianity needs to recover this Reformation emphasis on the image of God as moral and relational. We have been captivated by pop psychologies that tend to define God's image as a trichotomous division of the human psyche, or by the neo-orthodox equation of the image with the creation of male and female, or even by an anti-ecological distortion of the command to exercise dominion over the earth (in the context of the *imago Dei*—Gen. 1:27–28).

Interestingly, Paul here associates God's image ("likeness") with his glory (v. 43), as also in 11:7. And 2 Corinthians 3:7–18 links God's glory with his revelation to Moses on Sinai, a revelation that disclosed that glory in terms of God's communicable attributes (Ex. 33:18–34:7). In many circles eager to preserve God's truth, Christians today need to work equally hard at showing his mercy and modeling the facets of God's image that Exodus 34:6–7a recounts: "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished."

The ultimate vanquishing of death, with which 1 Corinthians 15 culminates, surely speaks volumes to those who continue to live in fear of death today. It is not just Sartre who has raised the specter of suicide as the only serious question for humans to debate. Existential and ecological fears pervade much of the non-Christian world. Christians ought to fear less. They may grieve the loss of loved ones and have a certain anxiety related to the unknown factors surrounding their own death, but neither reaction ought to be “like the rest of men who have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13). Funerals for Christians ought to be first of all celebrations of their “homegoing.” While preserving a culturally appropriate solemnity, a spirit of joy and a message of hope should nevertheless pervade such ceremonies, which may even include a tasteful evangelistic address to unbelievers present. And the hope of resurrection should encourage those of us who remain alive to persevere in a “long obedience in the same direction” (v. 58).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Blomberg, C. (1994). [\*1 Corinthians\*](#) (pp. 320–322). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.