

1 COR. 15:1 – 16:24

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VI. Correcting a Mistaken View of the Resurrection 15:1-58

Excursus on Resurrection and Materialistic Eschatology

This entire chapter is devoted to correcting the view of some in the Corinthian church that the dead will not be *resurrected*. That this is the issue is clear from v. 12: *But if Christ is preached, that he has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is not a resurrection of the dead?*

In denying there is a resurrection of the dead, the Corinthians were not denying that the soul or spirit of people continued to exist after death; they were denying that the dead would return to *bodily* life. That is what "resurrection" meant in the ancient world. The renowned scholar N. T. Wright describes the ancient understanding of the term in *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper, 2008), 36:

Within this world, the word *resurrection* in its Greek, Latin, or other equivalents was never used to mean life after death. *Resurrection* was used to denote new bodily life *after* whatever sort of life after death there might be. When the ancients spoke of resurrection, whether to deny it (as all pagans did) or to affirm it (as some Jews did), they were referring to a two-step narrative in which resurrection, meaning new bodily life, would be preceded by an interim period of bodily death. *Resurrection* wasn't, then, a dramatic or vivid way of talking about the state people went into immediately after death. It denoted something that might happen (though almost everyone thought it wouldn't) sometime *after* that. This meaning is constant throughout the ancient world until the post-Christian coinages of second-century Gnosticism. Most of the ancients believed in life after death; some of them developed complex and fascinating beliefs about it, which we have just touched on; but outside Judaism and Christianity (and perhaps Zoroastrianism, though the dating of that is controversial), they did not believe in resurrection.

In content, *resurrection* referred specifically to something that happened to the body; hence the later debates about how God would do this – whether he would start with the existing bones or make new ones or whatever. One would have debates like that only if it was quite clear that what you ended up with was something tangible and physical. Everybody knew about ghosts, spirits, visions, hallucinations, and so on. Most people in the ancient world believed in some such things. They were quite clear that that wasn't what they meant by *resurrection*. . . . Resurrection meant bodies. We cannot emphasize this too strongly, not least because much modern

writing continues, most misleadingly, to use the word *resurrection* as a virtual synonym for *life after death* in the popular sense.

So if an ancient writer intended to use "resurrection" as a metaphor for something other than restoration of bodily life, he would need to signal or indicate that intention. Otherwise, he would be understood to be using the word normally, non-metaphorically, which is clearly how Paul is using it in 1 Corinthians 15.

It is helpful to recognize that in denying there is a resurrection of the dead, the Corinthians were not denying expressly that *Jesus* had been raised from the dead. Paul makes clear in 15:1-4, 11 that they accepted the truth of Jesus' resurrection when he preached the gospel to them. Rather, they were denying that *others*, mere humans, those who were not God incarnate, would likewise be resurrected. Some were saying there is not a resurrection of *the dead ones*, plural; they were denying a general resurrection. Paul tells them, as we will see, that the two go together; to deny the one is to deny the other implicitly.

As indicated in the quote from Wright, some in the ancient pagan world denied there was any kind of life after death, but *most* pagans believed that a person's spirit or soul continued to exist after death. Those pagans who believed in a continuing spiritual existence did not believe in *resurrection*, in the restoration of bodily life after death. For them, death was a one-way street to a disembodied existence. That is why when Paul preached about Jesus and *the* resurrection in Athens (Acts 17:18), another Greek city about 65 miles from Corinth, some who heard mocked him (Acts 17:32). A similar sense of incredulity existed among some Corinthian Christians, as is evident in the two questions of 1 Cor. 15:35. These questions express the crux of the problem resurrection posed for the Greek mindset: How are the dead raised? With what sort of body do they come?

Some Jews, like the Sadducees, denied there was any kind of life after death, and others, like Philo, believed that one would continue to exist after death as a disembodied soul or spirit. But *most* ancient Jews believed that God would raise his people bodily from the dead at the last day, the day on which he judged and remade the world. As James Ware states in "The Resurrection of Jesus in the Pre-Pauline Formula of 1 Cor 15.3-5," *New Testament Studies* 60 (2014), 491, "To be sure, it is beyond controversy that belief in the restoration to life of the flesh-and-bones body was the general or dominant view held by most first-century Jews."

That belief is behind Martha's statement in Jn. 11:24 that she knows her dead brother Lazarus "will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." You see it in the Sadducees' reference to "the resurrection" in the hypothetical they posed to Jesus in Mat. 22:23-28 (v. 28; also Mk. 12:18-23 and Lk. 20:27-33). It also is evident in Paul's play to the Pharisees in Acts 23:6 that he was on trial with respect to the hope of the resurrection of the dead and in his statement in Acts 24:15 that his accusers from Jerusalem accept the hope that there will be a resurrection of both the just and unjust.

I regret to say that far too many in the church today continue this Corinthian denial of the resurrection. They continue to insist that Christians will spend eternity as disembodied spirits (souls), as nonphysical beings, in a nonphysical realm known as heaven. But that is not the biblical

picture. For now, we do exist after death as disembodied spirits in heaven, but that is only a temporary or intermediate state, not how we will spend eternity. Our *eternal* existence will be in resurrected bodies in a transformed physical creation, a "heavenized" creation, what is called the new heavens and new earth, which will come about at Christ's return. As Paul says in Rom. 8:18-25, creation itself will be freed from decay, redeemed from the consequences of human sin to which it was subjected at the Fall. God's good creation will be reaffirmed, not abandoned.

I know from past experience that what I am saying may strike some of you as novel and eccentric, something that is doctrinally suspect. But I assure you it is not. The belief that Christians will be raised bodily, physically, from the dead is without question the historic, orthodox Christian view. It has been part of the Christian faith from the beginning. In his monumental work, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), N. T. Wright analyzes dozens of noncanonical Christian texts from the late first century through the early third century and concludes (p. 551):

Christianity affirmed in great detail the belief that resurrection involved going through death and into a non-corruptible body the other side; that it involved one person, the Messiah, being raised from the dead ahead of everybody else; and that it allowed for an intermediate state which might best be described in terms of the departed person being with the Lord until the resurrection.

He writes in *Surprised By Hope* (p. 43): "But from the start within early Christianity it was built in as part of the belief in resurrection that the new body, though it will certainly be a body in the sense of a physical object occupying space and time, will be a *transformed* body, a body whose material, created from the old material, will have new properties." Wright notes (p. 158) that this was the view of the leading theologians of the medieval period, citing Gregory the Great (540-604), Anselm (1033-1109), Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1142), Bernard (1090-1153), and Thomas (1225-1274). He writes: "Mainstream medieval theologians like Thomas and Bernard insisted on the bodily resurrection. They, like the New Testament and the early church fathers, held a strong view of God's good creation. They knew it must be reaffirmed, not abandoned."

Roger Olson, a scholar who specializes in historical theology, states in *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002) 311, 314:

The bodily resurrection of all people at some time after death has played a prominent role in Christian teaching throughout history. In spite of a pronounced tendency among untutored lay Christians to focus attention on immortality of souls and neglect bodily resurrection, the fathers of the church, medieval Christian thinkers, all the Protestant Reformers and faithful modern biblical scholars and theologians have emphasized the bodily resurrection as the blessed hope of believers in Christ. . . .

It would be impossible to discover any single point of greater agreement in the history of Christian thought than this one: *the future bodily resurrection of the dead is the blessed hope of all who are in Christ Jesus by faith*. Over two millennia the church's leaders and faithful theologians have unanimously taught this above the immortality of souls and as more important than some ethereal intermediate state between bodily death and bodily resurrection when Christ returns. And yet, as we lamented earlier, it seems that the vast majority of Christians do not know this and neglect belief in bodily resurrection in favor of belief in immediate post-mortem heavenly, spiritual existence as ghost-like beings (or even angels!) "forever with the Lord in heaven."

It was the Gnostics, that notorious group of heretics of the second century and beyond, who insisted on a nonphysical eternity because of their conviction that creation and matter were evil, the product of a lesser god. Physical creation in their view was a prison from which the spirit needed to escape. George MacRae writes in his chapter "Apocalyptic Eschatology in Gnosticism" in David Hellholm, editor, *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1983), 323:

What is of course most distinctive of the apocalyptic eschatology of Gnosticism is the total absence of any new creation. Given its radically dualistic perspective, expressed in the concept of creation as error, Gnosticism can see the end time only as the dissolution of the created world. . . . Ultimate destiny is the reintegration of the divine particles into God, the dissolution of multiplicity in the restored unity. And with that the whole cosmos disappears.

Church historian Michael Svigel states in "Extreme Makeover: Heaven and Earth Edition – Will God Annihilate the World and Re-Create It Ex Nihilo?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171 (2014), 402-403:

Rather than a carefully harvested selective reading of the patristic period, these voices from the second through fifth centuries actually represent a unified chorus of fathers who shared the view that this created universe would not cease to exist in a final conflagration. Instead, the fires of judgment would purge and purify the present material world, renewing and readying it for eternal life. Indeed, to find contrary voices during the patristic period, one has to peer across the boundary line of catholic Christianity and look to the Gnostic heretics, who delighted in an eschatology that anticipated the total annihilation of the physical universe.

The paradise that was lost in Genesis is regained in Revelation and regained to a transcendent degree, regained in even greater form. Revelation pictures the restoration of all things promised by God through the prophets, the restoration mentioned by Peter in Acts 3:21. The curse that followed sin in Genesis is removed in Revelation (22:3), the creation that was defiled by sin in Genesis is transformed into the new heaven and new earth in Revelation (21:1-4; see also 2 Pet. 3:13), and the tree of life from which mankind was banished in Genesis because

of sin is part of the eternal home of the redeemed in Revelation (22:2, 14, 19). The continuity is hard to miss.

The crucial point is that the problem with creation is *not its materiality*; again, that is a Gnostic perspective. After all, God is the one who made humans and the earth of material substance and then pronounced his physical creation "very good." Rather, the problem with creation is the corrupting, ruinous effect of sin that was introduced into the human realm, the physical world, by Satan through Adam and Eve. Eliminating creation rather than rescuing it would mean Satan had succeeded in damaging God's good creation beyond remedy. As theologian Michael Goheen observes in "[\(Re\)New\(ed\) Creation: The End of the Story](#)," 5:

In the temptation in the garden Satan sought to thwart God's plan. Sin and its consequences now touch all of creation. If the presence of sin in the creation leads God to destroy his creation saving only some human souls, Satan will have gained a tremendous victory. Satan's work will have been quite successful. J. A. Seiss puts it this way: '. . . if redemption does not go as far as the consequences of sin, it is a misnomer, and fails to be redemption. . . . The salvation of any number of individuals . . . is not the redemption of what fell but the gathering up of a few splinters. . . . Satan's mischief goes further than Christ's restoration.' [J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, n.d.), 483]. The story of the Bible moves toward that time when God's restorative work will go as far as Satan's mischief.

He illustrates the point this way:

Imagine a child who is healthy in every way contracts some disease that begins to have a devastating effect on her body. The doctor diagnoses the disease and seeks to prescribe a remedy that will remove the disease and its debilitating effects from her body. The doctor that destroys the patient and proclaims victory over the disease would be a poor doctor indeed! We can speak here of the healing of the creation. God's redemptive remedy has the goal of destroying sin and its effects so that the creation can be healthy again, the way it was supposed to be. Salvation is the healing *of* the creation not an escape *out of* the creation.

Many notable figures in the history of churches of Christ subscribed to a materialistic eschatology. This includes Robert Haldane, Alexander Campbell, Moses Lard, David Lipscomb, J. W. McGarvey, and James Harding.¹ Indeed, "it was the dominant perspective among churches of Christ in the late nineteenth century, particularly as articulated by David Lipscomb and James A. Harding, co-founders of the Nashville Bible School (now Lipscomb University)."² It seems,

¹ John Mark Hicks, "[Heaven on Earth" – A Stone-Campbell Tradition](#)"; see also, Bobby Valentine, "[Alexander Campbell & the Regeneration of Creation](#)."

² John Mark Hicks, "[What Will Become of the Earth: A Nashville Bible School Perspective](#)." It was during this same era that the Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge wrote: "The Bible concerns man. The earth was cursed for

however, that this eschatological view was a casualty of the war over premillennialism that was waged in the church in the 1930s and 40s. Though materialistic eschatology does not entail premillennialism, as often happens in theological battles, relevant distinctions were cast aside and the new-earth baby was thrown out with the premillennial bathwater, presumably because both involve a material state.³

To this day, many in churches of Christ have a reflexive aversion to materialistic eschatology which pushes them toward unlikely readings of the relevant texts and to speak as though materialistic eschatology is beyond the theological and exegetical pale. Some simply dismiss the idea out of hand with the charge, "That's Jehovah's Witness doctrine." So if what I am saying is new to you, it is not because it has not been known and accepted from the beginning; it is because it became disfavored in our heritage as collateral damage of a twentieth-century theological battle.

I will say more about resurrection as we work our way through chapter 15, and in the course of doing so will address some questions you may have. But let me here just cite you to some things I have written that lay out and develop the biblical and historical basis for a bodily resurrection and a materialistic eschatology generally. If you are interested, take a look at: (1) the subsection "Views of Death and Afterlife at Time of Christ" (pp. 5-7) of [The Historical Case for the Resurrection of Christ](#), (2) [The Resurrection of the Body](#), (3) [On the Materiality of the Eternal State](#), (4) [A Brief Study of Eschatology](#), and (5) [Some Thoughts on the Intermediate State of the Dead](#). If you read those, you at least will have a fuller understanding of why I believe as I do.

I will end this excursus with another quote from N. T. Wright, this one from his November 2016 lecture titled "Jesus and the Future":

[Israel's] story always was about creation and new creation, about God dealing with the corruption that followed from human idolatry and relaunching his project of creation. Now it had happened; new creation had arrived, close-up and personal [in Jesus Christ]. . . . And all this makes it more important than ever that we grasp the reality of bodily resurrection. The word "resurrection" was never in the first century a generalized word for life after death. That is to say, the word resurrection presupposes a two-stage post-mortem reality, and the word resurrection refers to the second stage in that sequence. God the Creator will make new heavens and new earth, a new world that will be *more* physical, *more* full of pulsating life than the present one. God loves bodies, God loves stuff, he loves the creation; he made this

his transgression. That curse is to be removed when man's redemption is completed. The κτίσις that was made subject to futility for man's sin, is our earth; and our earth is the κτίσις which is to be delivered from the bondage to corruption. The change to be effected is in the dwelling place of man." Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946 [reprint 1873]), 3:854.

³ John Mark Hicks, "[From Lipscomb to Wallace on 'New Creation' Theology](#)." One can see this concern over premillennialism in Burton Coffman's [comment on Rom. 8:19](#). After acknowledging that Charles Hodge's logic in arguing that the verse refers to nature, to the subhuman creation, "is persuasive and difficult of refutation," he adds, "but Hodge himself admitted that 'In the early Christian church, this opinion was prevalent, and was the germ whence the extravagance of the Millenarians arose.'"

world full of life and power and beauty. And if we look at the world with the jaundiced eyes of a world-weary Platonist – we think that it is all rotten, full of change and decay, and must be done away with – we are missing the point. The Jewish hope of resurrection was always for renewed creation, not the abolition of creation and the establishment of a different sort of thing, as though the Creator decided that the first creation was actually a failed experiment and he better do a nonphysical one the next time around. . . . So when we're talking about the resurrection we're talking about bodies, about new creation, about a world, and about human beings being *more* alive than at present. . . . Do you know how when you meet somebody you know who has been very sick and you see them for the first time after they've been sick, you say, "Poor old so and so, he's just a shadow of his former self"? If you are a part of Jesus' family, "in the Messiah" as Paul puts it, if you are indwelt by the Spirit, you are just a shadow of your *future* self.

A. The gospel includes the bodily resurrection of Christ (15:1-11) – **Now I make known to you, brothers, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, ²through which also you are being saved, if you hold firm to what word I preached to you – unless you believed in vain. ³For I delivered to you, among the first things, what also I received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures ⁴and that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures ⁵and that he was seen by Cephas, then by the Twelve; ⁶afterward he was seen by over five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some fell asleep; ⁷afterward he was seen by James, then by all the apostles, ⁸and last of all, as to one untimely born, he was seen by me also. ⁹For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not in vain. Rather, I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God that was with me. ¹¹Therefore, whether I or they, thus we preach and thus you believed.**

1. As I noted in the excursus, some Corinthians apparently believed the eternal state would be nonphysical, that Christians who died in Christ would not receive a resurrection body but rather would spend eternity as disembodied spirits. Their Greek worldview made them incredulous about an eternal physical existence, which is expressed in the questions of 15:35: How are the dead raised? With what sort of body do they come?

2. Paul reminds them in this section that the gospel they heard from him and accepted, the gospel that is saving them, includes the bodily resurrection of *Jesus* from the grave.

a. Paul notes that this gospel saves them "if [they] hold firm." This is a warning that the truth of that message cannot be abandoned without consequences. They must continue to believe what God has said about his work in Christ.

b. Paul adds that holding firm to the gospel message will save them "unless [they] believed in vain." If the gospel message was false, as their denial that *Christians* will be

resurrected implied, then belief in that gospel would profit nothing. In that case, they would have believed in vain. The reason their denial that Christians will be resurrected implied the gospel was false is that, as Paul makes clear in 15:13, it implied that *Christ* was not resurrected, and *Christ's* resurrection is a fundamental aspect of the gospel. As Paul would later write in 2 Tim. 2:8, "Remember Jesus Christ, *raised from the dead*, a descendant of David, *according to my gospel*." The apostles' preaching in Acts confirms the link between the gospel and the Lord's resurrection (e.g., Acts 2:22-24, 3:13-15, 10:36-41, 13:26-39, and 17:30-32).

3. In vv. 3-5 Paul reminds them of the most important tenets of the gospel that he had received and passed on to them. For a number of reasons, Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 15:3-5 is generally recognized to be an early credal formula. (A creed is a set way of expressing certain important truths that usually facilitates memorization.)

a. Paul says in 1 Cor. 15:3 that he previously had "passed on" to the Corinthians the elements of this creed, which is a reference to his visit some four years earlier, and he also says that he had "received" this credal formula even earlier than that. So we know that within twenty years of Christ's death, and most likely within six or seven years (when Paul first met with the leaders of the church in Jerusalem - Acts 9:26-29), a set statement was circulating that included not only belief in Christ's resurrection but the assertion that he had been seen by Peter and the Twelve.

b. Paul having received this tradition from men is not inconsistent with his statement in Gal. 1:11-12 that he did not receive his gospel from human beings but through a revelation of Jesus Christ. In Galatians he is referring to the gospel itself, the truth of Christ's atoning sacrifice and resurrection and its meaning for Gentiles, not to a credal formula, a specific shorthand way of expressing of those truths. The tradition, the credal formula, he received from men was consistent with the gospel he already had received from the Lord. As Joseph Fitzmyer notes in *First Corinthians*, Anchor Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008) 545-546, "in Galatians he is referring not to the formulation, but to the content of the gospel as a whole. In using *tíni logō* ['what word' in 1 Cor. 15:2], he insists on the very formulation, which he has inherited from tradition . . ."

c. Vv. 6-7 do not appear to be part of the familiar creed and probably do not belong to "the gospel which [Paul] preached to [them]." Paul probably adds the information about these additional appearances, which he no doubt had taught in Corinth, to bolster the case for the reality of Christ's bodily resurrection and to remind them of his own place in the tradition.

d. The first item in the creed is "that Christ died for our sins."

(1) Paul says in Gal. 1:4, Jesus "gave himself for our sins." Elsewhere in 1 Corinthians he says "our Passover lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed" (5:7) and "you were bought with a price" (6:20, 7:23), and he refers to the weak brother as "the brother for whom Christ died" (8:11).

(2) This presupposes alienation between God and humans because of sin, and it means that Jesus who is the Christ, God's anointed one, died to pay the just penalty for our sins and to overcome that alienation. The cross is where God's justice and mercy, his holiness and love, are expressed simultaneously. Because in his love God desires to forgive us of our sin, he sent Jesus, his Son, to take upon himself the punishment for that sin. So in the cross God is able to satisfy both his holiness and his love; his justice and his mercy. In other words, through the cross God is able to forgive *justly*, to forgive *righteously*.

(3) This was "according to the Scriptures" in that the deliverance through sacrifice is a regular feature of the O.T. More specifically, Isaiah 53 describes the one who "as a lamb led to slaughter" took away the sins of the people.

e. The second item in the creed is "that he was buried." In the creed this functions to verify the reality of Christ's death. In this context, it emphasizes the fact that what was resurrected is what had previously been buried, i.e., his body. What was buried is what was raised. Christ's resurrection was not merely some spiritual phenomenon; the tomb was empty!

f. The third item in the creed is "that he was raised on the third day." It may be that "according to the Scriptures" relates only to his being raised and not also to "on the third day." According to Acts 2:25-36 and 13:35-37, Ps. 16:8-11 and 110:1 bear witness to the Messiah's resurrection (see also, Isa. 53:10b-11, 54:7). If Paul means that "on the third day" also is according to the Scriptures, there are several O.T. passages that refer to divine deliverance occurring on the third day (Hos. 6:1-2; Jonah 1:17 [see, Mat. 12:40]; 2 Ki. 20:5). Also, the day on which Jesus was raised, the third day, was Sunday, which according to Lev. 23:10-11, 15 is the day the firstfruits of the harvest (see, 1 Cor. 15:20, 23) are offered to the Lord.

g. The fourth item in the creed is "that he was seen by Cephas and then by the Twelve." This is so important to Paul's argument that he appends four more appearances to these first two. Jesus' resurrection was not a form of spiritual existence; he was raised from the dead *bodily* and seen by many witnesses on a variety of occasions.

4. In vv. 6-8 Paul recounts other appearances of the resurrected Christ, ending with the Lord's appearance to him on the Damascus Road. In referring to himself as "one untimely born," Paul is probably picking up a derogatory label that some Corinthians had applied to him with regard to his supposedly undeveloped spirituality. The word he uses referred to a birth after an abnormal gestation period, including abortions and miscarriages, and carried a sense of deficiency.

5. In vv. 9-10 Paul digresses about his apostleship. He does not disown "the untimely born" as a term of his relative worthlessness, but uses it to once again exalt the grace of God in his life. Whatever his weakness in relation to the other apostles, God graciously called him to be an apostle, and that grace both motivated and empowered him so that he labored more abundantly than all of the other apostles.

6. In v. 11 Paul returns to the point of the paragraph, namely that the gospel which is preached by all the apostles and which they believed includes the bodily resurrection of Christ. That is fundamental.

B. Logical conclusion of denying resurrection of the dead (15:12-19) – **¹²But if Christ is preached, that he has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is not a resurrection of the dead? ¹³Now if there is not a resurrection of the dead, neither has Christ been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, then empty [indeed] is our preaching, empty also is your faith. ¹⁵And also, we are found to be false witnesses of God because we testified against God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised; ¹⁷and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is useless; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then also, those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹If only for this life we have hoped in Christ, we are more pitiable than all men.**

1. Given that the gospel includes the resurrection of the dead-and-buried Christ, Paul wants to know how some can claim that there is no resurrection of the dead. In his view, the future resurrection of Christians is so inextricably linked to the resurrection of Christ – they are part of one harvest as he will specify in the next paragraph – that to deny the one is to deny the other (v. 13, 16).

a. J. C. Beker rightly observed in *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 171), "Indeed, according to Paul, the gospel is integrally connected with his apocalyptic worldview: he cannot conceive of the resurrection of Christ – which the Corinthians affirm (1 Cor 15:1, 2, 11) – apart from the apocalyptic resurrection of the dead. Both stand or fall together."

b. Richard Oster states in 1 Corinthians, College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995), 375:

Paul turns the argument to demonstrate the logical consequences of the position of these Corinthians if they, rather than Paul, are correct. Since the Apostle's argument rests upon the premise of an inextricable link between the believers' and Jesus' resurrection, he reasons that disbelief in the general resurrection of believers logically leads to disbelief in Christ's resurrection.

c. Mark Taylor likewise observes (p. 380), "Paul's premise, 'If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised,' indicates that the deniers of resurrection in Corinth did not contest the resurrection of Christ. . . . Yet the major premise of Paul's logic is that to deny the resurrection of the dead generally excludes even the resurrection of Jesus."

2. And if it is true that Christ has not been raised, then:

a. neither the apostles' preaching nor the Corinthians' faith has any basis in reality, and thus neither has any significance or value.

b. the apostles are liars because they testify that God did indeed resurrect Jesus from the grave. Notice that the resurrection of Christ is part of the gospel message (e.g., 2 Tim. 2:8 - "Remember Jesus Christ, *raised from the dead*, a descendant of David, *according to my gospel*").

c. the Corinthians' faith is useless. As such, they are still in their sins and therefore alienated from God and under his just wrath.

d. those who have died believing in Christ have perished. They are lost, having no hope for any future blessing.

3. If the Christian's hope in Christ is limited to this life, if there is no resurrection of the dead as some Corinthians claim, then Christianity is a lie and those who have given their hearts and souls to it are due the utmost pity. They have spent their lives as fools, people who have been duped into ordering their lives around a fable.

C. But Christ has been raised and is the firstfruits of Christian's who have died (15:20-28) – **²⁰But as it is, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹For since death [came] through a man, also the resurrection of the dead [came] through a man. ²²For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. ²³But each in his own order: the firstfruits, Christ; then those who are of Christ, at his coming; ²⁴then the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God, the Father, when he brings to an end every ruler and every authority and power. ²⁵For he must reign until he has put all the enemies under his feet. ²⁶The last enemy is brought to an end, namely death. ²⁷For "he has subjected all things under his feet." Now when it says that all things have been subjected, it is clear that it is with the exception of the one who subjected all things to him. ²⁸And when all things are subjected to him, then [even] the Son himself will be subjected to the one who subjected all things to him, so that God may be all in all.**

1. But the fact of matter is that Christ has been raised from the dead and is the "firstfruits" of the end-time resurrection. His resurrection serves as a pledge or guarantee on God's part of the final end-time harvest.

a. As David Garland explains (p. 705-706):

The term "firstfruits" does not simply signify Christ's chronological precedence as the first one raised from the dead, however. It conveys that his resurrection is the "first of a kind, involving the rest in its character or destiny" (Parry 1926:223). That is why Paul says that Christ is "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep," not "of the resurrected." His resurrection was not simply God's miraculous intervention that rescued him from death, but was "the beginning of God's renewal of all things" (Perkins 1984: 318; cf. Schrage 2001: 160). The concept of firstfruits expects that "the rest *must* follow" (Weiss 1910: 356). Holleman (1996:204) contends that by

choosing this term, "Paul presents Jesus' resurrection as the beginning of the eschatological resurrection." As the firstfruits, Christ's resurrection is a pledge of the full harvest of resurrection to come: "The resurrection bodies . . . of the redeemed . . . are to correspond to and flow from Christ's in the same way that the harvest corresponds to and flows from its first fruits" (Kreitzer, DPL 11).

b. Murray Harris states in *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 110:

The firstfruits are related to the harvest as the part is to the whole (compare the use of *aparchē* in Rom. 11:16). As the first part of the harvest, the firstfruits were representative of the whole harvest, that is, the total harvest was representatively and potentially present in the firstfruits. So it is that the whole, of which the resurrection of Christ is the first part, is the resurrection of 'those who belong to Christ' (1 Cor. 15:23). The resurrection of all believers is the necessary aftermath of the resurrection of Christ since the two are intrinsically connected, belonging as they do to a single harvest.

c. Stephen Wellum states in *God the Son Incarnate* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 228, "Just as the firstfruits of the harvest are a foretaste of the full harvest (Lev. 23:9-14), so Christ's resurrection anticipates and ensures the believer's resurrection. It is God's 'down payment' (*arrabōn*), a pledge that the final eschatological end is surely coming."

2. Our resurrection is tied to his, so much so that in 2 Cor. 4:14 Paul says "we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also *with Jesus*." We are all the same harvest. He is the "*firstborn* from the dead" (Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5). And we, as part of the Lord's resurrection harvest, likewise will receive glorified and immortal *bodies* in our resurrection (Rom. 8:11, 23, 29; 1 Cor. 15:35-49; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Jn. 3:2). His resurrection body is the prototype or model after which our resurrection bodies will be patterned. Jack Cottrell writes in *The Faith Once for All: Bible Doctrine for Today* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002) 281:

The second phase of the new creation will be the day of the second coming of Jesus, when all the redeemed will receive new, glorified bodies. Most will receive them at the moment of resurrection itself, but living believers will receive them in an instantaneous change: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet . . . the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed" (1 Cor 15:52). This event is called "the redemption of our body," and Paul says this is what we are "waiting eagerly for" (Rom 8:23). See 2 Cor 5:1-5.

The glorified resurrection body of Jesus is the prototype or model after which our own glorified bodies will be patterned. Jesus "will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that he has even to subject all things to Himself" (Phil 3:21). This is what Paul means when he says that foreknown believers are "predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom 8:29). That is, our own new bodies will

be of the same nature as the glorified human body of Jesus. "We will be like Him, because we will see Him as he is" (1 John 3:2); i.e., we shall be like him in his human bodily nature, not in his divine nature.

3. That is why Jesus said in Jn. 5:28-29 that "an hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good to a resurrection of life, but those who have done evil to a resurrection of judgment." Though Lazarus was raised to the same life he had known before his death, that event leaves no doubt as to the meaning of "coming out" in Jn. 5:28-29. It refers to a bodily exit from the grave (Jn. 11:43-44). This is the raising up that will occur on the last day (Jn. 6:39-40, 44, 54).

4. Paul explains this consequence of Christ's resurrection in terms of the Adam-Christ parallel. Just as death is the inevitable consequence of our connection to Adam, so resurrection is the inevitable consequence of our connection to Christ. Here, of course, Paul is referring to the *resurrection of life* Jesus mentioned in Jn. 5:29, the resurrection of those who because of Christ will have true life in the presence of God. He is not concerned with the *resurrection of judgment* also mentioned in Jn. 5:29, the resurrection of those who will experience eternal sorrow. Paul recognizes this distinction in Acts 24:15, where he speaks of "a resurrection of both the just and the unjust," but as in 1 Thess. 4:13-18, he focuses only on the resurrection of the saints.

5. But the resurrection secured by Christ occurs in a certain order, according to God's plan. First Christ is resurrected and then, at the time of his Second Coming, those who are in him are resurrected. This is essentially what he told the Thessalonians in 1 Thess. 4:13-18.

6. At his return, the Lord Jesus consummates or finalizes the kingdom he inaugurated or initiated at his first coming.

a. In other words, he completes his rescue of fallen creation, brings to fulfillment the victory he achieved through the cross, by purging from creation all agents and effects of sin, all that is contrary to God's eternal vision, the last of which is death itself. Jesus is the faithful and obedient Son who, having paid the price to reconcile all things, was exalted by God the Father, being given authority over all things (e.g., Eph. 1:20-22; Phil. 2:9; Heb. 1:3b-4). And in that power and authority he will return to deal with all remaining disruptions produced by sin and all who refused to be reconciled.

b. This is the mighty return in which all foes are destroyed, the majestic return pictured in 1 Thess. 4:13-18, 2 Thess. 1:5-10, and Revelation 19:11-21. It is the time when, in the words of Phil. 2:10-11, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Some will do so in heartfelt joy; others only in submission to a power they cannot resist.

c. Creation will at that time be transformed into the new heaven and new earth spoken of by Isaiah, Peter, and John. It will be "heavenized," transformed into a realm of

perfect love and fellowship with God and each other, an eternal state in which there will be no death or mourning or crying or pain. This is the merger of heaven and earth that is pictured so beautifully in Rev. 21:1-5; it is the time, in the words of Rom. 8:21, when creation itself will *also* be freed from the slavery of decay to which it was subjected at the Fall and will enter into the end-time glory to be enjoyed by God's children. We and it both are getting the "ultimate makeover."

d. Christ will put all the enemies under his feet (v. 25) because God the Father has ordained it, has subjected all things under Christ's feet (v. 27a). Indeed, he exalted Jesus as Lord, gave him authority over all things, for that end. Paul hastens to add that in subjecting all things under Christ's feet God the Father is not included in "all things." He is not and will not be subject to Christ; rather, Christ is subject to him.

e. The God-man Jesus, the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, is the perfectly faithful Son, the one who prayed, "Not my will but yours be done" (Mat. 26:10; Mk. 14:36). He is and will always be subject to the Father. This does not mean that in his divinity Jesus lacks anything of "Godness." He serves as the Son without diminishing in the least the truth that his divine nature is the same essence or being as the Father and the Spirit.

f. And having fully accomplished his mission, the Son presents or delivers to the Father this restored or rescued kingdom, this realm from which all discord has been eliminated and in which there is nothing but grateful and loving loyalty. He then, as the perfectly faithful Son, shares with the Father in the rule of that eternal kingdom. As we see in Rev. 22:1, 3, God and the Lamb share a throne in the new heaven and new earth.

g. The end result is that God is over all, meaning all things have been brought into proper relationship with him. The creation that was fractured and sickened in Genesis 3 has been fully, finally, and completely healed. The scope and breadth of Christ's healing work is also seen in Col. 1:19-20 where Paul speaks of Jesus as the one through whom God the Father reconciled *all things* to himself, making peace by the blood of his cross. And it is seen in Eph. 1:9-10 where Paul says the mystery of God's will for the administration of the fullness of the times is to bring *all things* together in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth. "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him" (2 Cor. 1:20, ESV).

D. Additional argument for truth of the resurrection (15:29-34) – ²⁹**Otherwise, what will they do, those who are being baptized because of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why indeed are they being baptized because of them?** ³⁰**Why indeed do we ourselves face danger every hour?** ³¹**Daily I face death; I swear by [my] boast in you, brothers, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord.** ³²**If as a [mere] man I fought wild beasts in Ephesus, what is the benefit to me? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."** ³³**Do not be deceived, "Evil associations ruin good habits."** ³⁴**Sober up, as is right, and stop sinning, for some have an ignorance of God. I say [this] to your shame.**

1. Paul continues his attack on their denial of the resurrection. He says "otherwise," meaning that if Christians are *not* destined for resurrection in Christ, then why are some of them being baptized because of the dead?

a. The prepositional phrase that I have rendered "*because of the dead*" (*huper tōn nekrōn*) and "*because of them*" (*huper autōn*) could be rendered "*in place of the dead*" and "*in place of them*." In that case, the sense would be that some Corinthians were undergoing baptism vicariously for dead people, were being baptized to benefit those who had already died. This is how the Mormons understand the verse, and they further claim that Paul was tacitly approving of the practice.

b. The sense of the phrases as I have rendered them is that some Corinthians were motivated, at least in part, to be baptized by those who had passed on before them. They were not baptized to procure some benefit for the dead but rather were influenced to be baptized by a desire to share in the future of those dead saints, to share in the resurrection.

(1) The dead who influenced them in that direction could have been deceased family members who were Christians or beloved brothers or sisters in the Lord. It is clear that a good number of Corinthian Christians had died (see, 11:30, 15:18, 20). That is how Anthony Thiselton understands the text. He summarizes the matter this way in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1248:

We may return to G. G. Findlay's succinct and careful comments. After exposing the fallacy of some competing views, he observes, "Paul is referring rather to a much commoner, indeed a normal experience, that death of Christians leads to the conversion of survivors, who in the first instance 'for the sake of the dead' (their beloved dead) and in the hope of reunion, turn to Christ -- e.g., when a dying mother wins her son by the appeal 'Meet me in heaven!' Such appeals, and their frequent salutary effect, give strong and touching evidence of faith in the resurrection."

(2) It is also possible, however, that the dead who influenced some of the Corinthians to be baptized were all the Christians who had died, whom they had heard would be resurrected. Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner paraphrase that meaning this way (p. 784-785): "Now, if there is no resurrection, what will be accomplished by those who get baptized because of what they have heard about how our dead will be raised? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people undergoing baptism on account of them?"

(3) In either of those cases, Paul's point is that those who have been baptized in this hope are dupes if the dead are not in fact raised. If there is no resurrection of dead saints, then they will not be reunited with their departed loved ones as anticipated or share in the assumed destiny of the dead saints. (At best, they will join them in some disembodied state where people are mere shadows of themselves.)

c. It is extremely unlikely that Paul was referring to Christians who were being baptized in place of dead people, being baptized to affect the spiritual destiny of non-Christians who had already died. The N.T. knows nothing of salvation apart from a personal faith, repentance, confession, and baptism, and vicarious baptism was unheard of in any orthodox Christian church in the first or following centuries. The earliest historical mention of vicarious baptism is in the mid-second century,⁴ and all the references involve heretical sects (Marcionites, Cerinthians, and Montanists). As Gordon Fee asks regarding the Mormon interpretation (p. 764, n. 17), "How can such a practice be so *completely* unknown if in fact it had had any authorization within the churches of the first century?"

2. Next Paul asks rhetorically why, if the resurrection is not true, he and his companions constantly risk death for the sake of a message that declares it *is* true. His point is that they would not do that unless they were certain the message was true. If the gospel is a lie, all the clarity it brought about the fate of the dead, both the blessing of being with the Lord in the intermediate state and the blessing of resurrection life after that, is gone.

a. One is left with the vagueness and uncertainty about death that haunted mankind from the Fall (e.g., Eccles. 9:3-5). What Jesus did to free those held in slavery by fear of death, in the words of Heb. 2:15, is turned to nothing by denial of the resurrection. In that case, we have not heard from one who already passed through death and returned victorious, never to die again.

b. The reference to Jesus in Heb. 2:10 that is often translated "the *pioneer* of their salvation" takes on a new significance in light of the Lord's resurrection. As the note to the NET states, the word can carry "nuances of 'trailblazer,' one who breaks through to new ground for those who follow him." That certainly is an apt description of Jesus as the firstborn from the dead, the first one to pass through death into resurrection life.

3. In v. 32 Paul elaborates on his risking death with a specific instance. He says, "If as a [mere] man I fought wild beasts in Ephesus, what is the benefit to me?" Paul clearly had a fierce struggle with opponents in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 1:8-11), for which fighting wild beasts is a metaphor, but we don't know much about it.

a. His point is that he would not have risked death in Ephesus as a mere human, as one without divine enlightenment about death, especially the enlightenment provided by Jesus' resurrection. He would not have done so because, from a merely human perspective, from such a limited, "under the sun" perspective, death is essentially a "black box," an unknown. So in that case he would have no reason to believe that any suffering or sacrifice ultimately mattered, was of any benefit; all lives seemingly would be leveled by death. In the refrain of the Teacher in Ecclesiastes (Qohelet), everything would appear meaningless and thus could not motivate the

⁴ The occasional Mormon claim that in the *Shepherd* (*Similitudes* 9.16.1-6) Hermas refers to Christians being baptized in the place of dead people is incorrect. See, Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 217-218.

conduct Paul exhibited in Ephesus. That death-defying conduct was motivated by the certainty about death provided by the divine enlightenment given most clearly in the resurrection of Christ.

b. If there is no resurrection, as some Corinthians claim, then the gospel is a lie, and if the gospel is a lie then Jesus cast no light on death. Death remains an unknown state that leaves one without any real hope. Thus, Paul says in v. 32b, "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'" Given the uncertainty about death without Jesus' light, one might as well live like this life is all there is, like "you only go around once." This statement ("Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die") is in Isa. 22:13 (LXX), but the sentiment was well known in the Greco-Roman world (Ciampa and Rosner, 791).

4. Paul urges them not to be misled and quotes a proverbial saying: "Evil associations ruin good habits." He is referring to those who deny the resurrection (15:12) and making the point that their doctrine will have a corrupting effect on the Corinthians' character. As he just indicated, the resurrection hope has important ethical ramifications; it fortifies a life of sacrifice and discipline. They need to "sober up" or come to their senses about the resurrection and start living accordingly.

E. Dispensing with a foolish objection to a bodily resurrection (15:35-44) – **³⁵But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? With what sort of body do they come?" ³⁶Foolish man! What you yourself sow is not made alive unless it dies. ³⁷And what do you sow? You do not sow the body that is going to be but a naked seed, perhaps of wheat or one of the rest. ³⁸But God gives a body to it as he has willed, and to each of the seeds [he gives] its own body. ³⁹Not all flesh is the same flesh; rather, [there is] one flesh for men and another flesh for animals and another flesh for birds and another for fish. ⁴⁰And [there are] heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly ones is one kind, and the glory of the earthly ones is another. ⁴¹The glory of the sun is one kind, and the glory of the moon is another, and the glory of the stars is another; indeed, star differs from star in glory. ⁴²So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in a perishable state; it is raised in an imperishable state. ⁴³It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. ⁴⁴It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.**

1. The rejection of a bodily resurrection by some in Corinth was apparently supported by their inability to understand how this would be accomplished. After all, the body is decayed. Paul calls them foolish for raising such an objection.

a. They simply need to look at the way God has arranged the natural order of plant life. The seed they sow "dies" in the sense it does not continue to exist as a seed but rather is transformed into a plant that has a different kind of body, a body given to it by God. Its form of being or existence as a seed gives way to another as it is divinely transformed. The seed that "dies" thus continues to live in resurrected form.

b. And they simply need to consider that God has made all kinds of different bodies. Earthly bodies differ from one another in terms of substance. Man has one kind of flesh, beasts, birds, and fish all have another. Earthly bodies differ from heavenly bodies, and heavenly bodies differ from each other in terms of splendor. God has adapted the bodies he has made to fit a variety of kinds of existence.

2. The resurrection of the dead follows the same principles.

a. Our present, earthly body, the naked seed, is sown in a perishable state, in dishonor, and in weakness, but *it* will be raised in an imperishable state, in glory, and in power. What is sown is what is raised; there is both continuity and transformation. James Ware observes in "The Resurrection of Jesus in the Pre-Pauline Formula of 1 Cor 15.3–5," *New Testament Studies* 60 (2014), 486, "Paul does not describe resurrection as an event in which x (the present body) is sown, but y (a body distinct from the present body) is raised, but in which a single x (the present body) is sown a perishable x, but raised an imperishable x."

b. As Ware has shown, this continuity between the present body and the resurrection body is confirmed by the regular use of the word ἐγείρω in relation to resurrection, the word that is translated "raised." Unlike the English word "raised," which can refer to something ascending or elevating, like a spark "rising" from a flame or a balloon "rising" in the air, ἐγείρω means to get up or stand up, that is, to rise from a supine to a standing position. Ware declares in his study (p. 494):

In no instance within ancient Greek literature does ἐγείρω denote the concept of ascension, elevation or assumption. Rather, it denotes the action whereby one who is prone, sitting, prostrate or lying down is restored to a standing position. . . . In resurrection contexts the verb does not therefore denote that the dead ascend or are assumed somewhere; rather, the verb signifies that the corpse, lying supine in the grave, gets up or arises to stand from the tomb. When used with reference to the dead, therefore, the term refers unambiguously to the reanimation or revivification of the corpse.

c. Just as the seed continues in a transformed body, so Christians will live forever in bodies of the resurrection. As Paul says in Phil. 3:20-21: "For our commonwealth is in heaven, from where we eagerly await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of his glory in accordance with the power that also enables him to subject all things to himself."

3. Our "natural body" that is sown, this body that is subject to death and thus is buried, planted in the ground, Paul says will be raised a "spiritual body." The phrase "spiritual body" does not mean the raised body will no longer be physical, that it will consist only of spirit. That is a misconception that has led some away from a proper understanding of resurrection and eschatology.

a. First, Paul does not say our natural body will be raised a *spirit*, a nonphysical entity. He says it will be raised a "spiritual *body*," and physicality is an inherent aspect of *sōma* ("body") when Paul uses it in reference to a person. Robert Gundry states in his influential study *Sōma in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1987) 168: "Contrary to all this, however, runs Paul's exceptionless use of *sōma* for a physical body. Had Paul wanted to portray the resurrection in any other fashion than in terms of physical bodies, he would not have used *sōma*."

b. Second, the adjective "spiritual" does not mean the noun it modifies lacks physicality, that it is something composed exclusively of an immaterial or noncorporeal spirit. In Greek, adjectives ending in *-ikos* (as opposed to those ending in *-inos*) "normally denote mode of existence rather than substance" (Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005], 132). Thus N. T. Wright explains in *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (p. 352), "The adjective [*pneumatikos*] describes, not what something is *composed of*, but what it is *animated by*. It is the difference between speaking of a ship made of steel or wood on the one hand and a ship driven by steam or wind on the other." For example, when we speak of an "electric car," we do not mean a car *made of* electricity but a car *powered by* electricity.

(1) Otherwise, given the inherent physicality of "body," the phrase "spiritual body" would be incoherent. It would suggest that the physical body is composed entirely of something nonphysical.

(2) Paul's uses of the adjective "spiritual" elsewhere in 1 Corinthians shows it does not mean that the noun to which it applies lacks physicality, is composed of spirit. In 1 Cor. 2:14-15 Paul uses the same two adjectives (*psychikos*/natural and *pneumatikos*/spiritual) in contrasting the "natural man" from the "spiritual man," and he certainly does not mean the latter is nonphysical! When he says in 1 Cor. 3:1 that he could not speak to them as "spiritual men but as to fleshly ones," he was not referring to their physicality. When he refers in 1 Cor. 10:3-4 to the manna and water provided during the Exodus and wilderness wandering as "spiritual food" and "spiritual drink," he was not suggesting they were nonphysical. And when he asks in 14:37 if anyone thinks he is a prophet or is "spiritual," he is not asking about their physicality.

c. Third, the parallel phrase "natural body" shows that "spiritual body" is not intended to refer to a nonphysical entity composed only of spirit. The adjective *psychikos*, which is translated "natural," is a cognate of the noun *psychē*, just as the adjective *pneumatikos* is a cognate of the noun *pneuma*. *Psychē* means "soul," and yet the phrase a "*psychikos* body" obviously does not describe something nonphysical, something that consists only of soul; rather, it describes the present mortal body, the body before it is transformed in the resurrection.

(1) James Ware makes the point in "The Resurrection of Jesus in the Pre-Pauline Formula of 1 Cor 15.3-5" (p. 488-489):

[If] *σῶμα πνευματικόν* in this context describes the composition of the future body, as a body composed solely of *pneuma*, its correlate *σῶμα ψυχικόν* would perforce describe the composition of the present body, as a body *composed only of soul*. Paul

would assert the absence of flesh and bones, not only from the risen body, but also from the present mortal body as well! The impossibility that ψυχικός here refers to the body's composition rules out the notion that its correlated adjective πνευματικός refers to the body's composition. Contrasted with ψυχικός, the adjective πνευματικός must similarly refer to the source of the body's life and activity, describing the risen body as *given life by the Spirit*.

(2) The contrast is not between *physical* bodies and spiritual bodies (contrary to RSV and NRSV), but between *natural* bodies and spiritual bodies. The contrast is between natural bodies, those common to mankind, and bodies that have been transformed so as to be suitable for the eternal state. They are "spiritual" not in the sense of noncorporeal (made of spirit) but in the sense of supernatural, in the sense they are imperishable, glorious, and powerful.

d. The fact "spiritual body" does not mean something nonphysical is recognized by a broad range of scholars. What I am telling you is not the least bit novel. Here are some examples.

(1) Mark Taylor states (p. 406-407), "The terms 'natural' and 'spiritual' in this context do not mean 'material' and 'immaterial' but rather describe the present earthly body and the future transformed, resurrection body shaped in the image of Christ."

(2) Michael Gorman, *Reading Paul* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008), 98 n. 6, "the phrase 'spiritual body' does *not* mean non-physical but rather Spirit-enlivened."

(3) Ben Witherington III states in *Paul's Narrative Thought World: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 329, "Spiritual body does not mean a body without substance, but a body animated and vivified by God's Spirit."

(4) Gordon Fee says (p. 786) the adjectives "natural" (*psychikos*) and "spiritual" (*pneumatikos*):

do not describe the "stuff" or composition of the body; . . . Rather, they describe the one body in terms of its essential characteristics as earthly, on the one hand, and therefore belonging to the life of the present age, and as heavenly, on the other, and therefore belonging to the life of the Spirit in the age to come. It is "spiritual," not in the sense of "immaterial" but of "supernatural," . . .

(5) Alan F. Johnson states in *1 Corinthians*, IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 304-305:

The *-ikos* ending on the adjective signals an "ethical or dynamic relation, not a material one" (Harris, 1990:402). So the words denote "not substances but modes of

being" (Thiselton 2000:1275). Therefore the proper distinction between the two types of embodiments is not material or physical versus immaterial or nonphysical but a body suited for the mere functioning of the *psychē*, the life principle, a body destined because of sin to die and to corrupt (Gen 3:19), in contrast to a body suited for the full functioning of the Holy Spirit, the imperishable resurrection body.

(6) Stephen Davis states in "Eschatology and Resurrection" in Jerry L. Walls, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 390:

Paul is not denying that resurrected bodies are physical, but is denying that they are frail and corruptible like natural bodies. So Paul's notion is that when God raises us, God will change our bodies into spiritual bodies, bodies controlled by the Holy Spirit, bodies fit for the kingdom of God. But they will still be bodies, and they will be continuous with (because they are the result of changes in) our old natural bodies.

(7) James Ware states (p. 489):

Both contextual and lexical evidence thus indicate that the phrase *σῶμα πνευματικόν* in 1 Cor 15:44-6 does not refer to a body composed of material *pneuma*, but to the fleshly body endowed with imperishable life by the power of the Spirit. Although the expression *σῶμα πνευματικόν* is unique here in Paul, the concept of the Spirit as the agent of resurrection life is a major theme within Paul's theology (Rom 8:9-11, 23; 2 Cor 5:4-5; Gal 5:25; 6:7-8). Within this theology, the work of the Spirit in those who belong to Christ will culminate in the resurrection, when 'the one who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who indwells you' (Rom 8:11).

4. The continuity between the present body and the resurrection body sometimes causes people to wonder if God will be able to resurrect those whose bodies have been incinerated or decayed to dust and scattered or consumed as nutrients by other living things. And to that I say that the God who spoke a universe into existence can handle the task. Indeed, Rev. 20:13 speaks of the sea giving up those who had died in it, so however disintegrated or dispersed human remains may be, they are not beyond the power of God to be taken up into the great transformation of the resurrection.

5. Also, the continuity between the present body and the resurrection body does not mean that bodily deformities or disabilities will carry over. At his first coming, Jesus healed the blind, lame, sick, and deformed to illustrate the character of the consummated kingdom, to show how things will be in that final state. All those things are the work of Satan, either directly or indirectly, and Satan's work will have no place in the consummated kingdom of God.

F. Support for claim of a spiritual body (15:45-49) – ⁴⁵**So also it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul"; the last Adam [became] a life-giving spirit.** ⁴⁶**But the spiritual**

[was] not first; rather, [there was] the natural, then the spiritual. ⁴⁷The first man [is] of the earth, made of dust; the second man [is] of heaven. ⁴⁸As [is] the man of dust, so also [are] those of dust; and as [is] the heavenly man, so also [are] the heavenly ones. ⁴⁹And just as we bore the image of the man of dust, so we will also bear the image of the heavenly man.

1. In v. 44b Paul asserts that the existence of a natural body presupposes the existence of its counterpart, a spiritual body; if there is one there is also the other. He then makes a statement in v. 45 that supports or conforms to that assertion ("So also"), but to appreciate his point it helps to know the Greek words he uses and to be aware of the literary device known as a synecdoche, which is where part of something is used to represent the whole (e.g., all hands on deck, those are nice wheels).

2. Gen. 2:7 (LXX) says that Adam became a living *psychē*. That Greek word can refer to a person's "soul" in distinction from his body (e.g., Rev. 20:4), but it also can refer, as a synecdoche, to the entire person, the being that includes a soul. It clearly functions that way in Gen. 2:7, which is why most English translations render the word in 1 Cor. 15:45 as *person* or *being* instead of soul (I kept the more literal "soul"). *Psychē* is the noun cognate of the adjective *psychikos*, which is the adjective used in the phrase "*natural* body." So the implication of the word *psychē* as a synecdoche for person in the statement in Gen. 2:7 that the first man (Paul's interpretive addition), Adam, became a living person is that Adam provided a *natural* (*psychikos*) body for his people.

3. Paul declares that the last Adam, Jesus, became a life-giving *pneuma*. That Greek word can refer a person's "spirit" in distinction from his body (e.g., 1 Cor. 5:3; 2 Cor. 7:1; Jas. 2:26), but it also can refer, as a synecdoche, to the entire person (e.g., 2 Chron. 36:22; Lk. 1:47; 1 Cor. 5:5; Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; 2 Tim. 4:22; Philem. 25).⁵ It functions that way in v. 45b in parallel to how *psychē* functions in the preceding clause (v. 45a). *Pneuma* is the noun cognate of the adjective *pneumatikos*, which is the adjective in the phrase "*spiritual* body." So the implication of the word *pneuma* as a synecdoche for person in the statement the last Adam, Jesus, became a life-giving person is that Jesus provided a spiritual (*pneumatikos*) body for his people. Thus, the first Adam became a living person (*psychē*), implying natural bodies, and the last Adam became a life-giving person (*pneuma*), implying spiritual bodies.

4. Paul says there is an order to the appearance of the natural body and the spiritual body. The natural came first in the first man, Adam, who was made from the dust, and then came the spiritual in the second man, Christ, who came from heaven. Those of dust, those who descend from the man of dust, are like the man of dust; we share in his naturalness. And those of heaven,

⁵ Eduard Schweizer states in *TDNT* 6:435, "it can denote man as a whole, with a stronger emphasis on his psychical than his physical nature." Anthony Hoekema concludes in *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 214, "*Pneuma*, it is clear, may often be used to designate the whole person; it, like *psyche*, describes an aspect of man in his totality." Darrell Bock states in *The Bible Knowledge Word Study: Acts – Ephesians* [2006], 419: "In this verse [Gal. 6:18] 'spirit' refers to the human spirit, a person's immaterial inner being, and by synecdoche (a part for the whole) denotes the whole person in terms of the mental and volitional aspects of one's personality (cf. Phil. 4:23; Philem. 25; 2 Tim. 4:22). It is comparable to the words 'with you' in Paul's benedictions elsewhere."

those who are born of the man from heaven, are like the man of heaven; we share in his supernaturalness. And this fact will play out in the same order: we first bore the image of Adam in the weakness of our natural bodies, but we will in the resurrection bear the image of Christ in the glory of our resurrection bodies.

G. Conclusion of argument about the resurrection body (15:50-57) – ⁵⁰**Now I say this, brothers, that flesh and blood is not able to inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.** ⁵¹**Pay attention; I tell you a mystery: we will not all sleep, but we all will be changed,** ⁵²**in an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet; for a trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.** ⁵³**For this perishable thing must put on imperishability, and this mortal thing must put on immortality.** ⁵⁴**And when this perishable thing puts on imperishability and this mortal thing puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be [fulfilled]: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."** ⁵⁵**Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?** ⁵⁶**Now the sting of death is sin, and the power of death is the law;** ⁵⁷**but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

1. Paul here concludes his argument about the resurrection body by stressing the necessity for transformation. The statement that "flesh and blood" cannot inherit the kingdom of God does not mean that no physical substance can enter the eternal state. Paul was speaking of "flesh and blood" *as presently constituted*, as subject to weakness, decay, and death. Our bodies cannot enter the eternal state, the consummated kingdom, without first being transformed into imperishable, glorious, powerful, and immortal bodies.

a. As Stephen Davis notes in "Eschatology and Resurrection," 390, "When Paul says, 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,' he is not saying that a body (the very term Paul uses, *soma*, implies physicality) cannot enter the kingdom of God, but that a body that has not yet been transformed by God via resurrection cannot do so."

b. Craig Blomberg explains in *1 Corinthians*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 316, "'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)."

c. Mark Taylor states (p. 411), "The phrase 'flesh and blood' refers to the earthly human body, which is subject to sin and death."

d. David Garland states (p. 741), "The first assertion, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, is explained by the second in ways that any Greek reader could understand. 'Flesh and blood' represents what is corruptible, and what is corruptible cannot stake a claim on what is incorruptible."

e. N. T. Wright states in *Surprised By Hope* (p. 156):

Paul declares that "flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom." He doesn't mean that physicality will be abolished. "Flesh and blood" is a technical term for that which is corruptible, transient, heading for death. The contrast, again, is not between what we call physical and what we call nonphysical but between *corruptible physicality*, on the one hand, and *incorruptible physicality*, on the other.

2. This transformation is essential for everyone entering the eternal kingdom, not only for those who died before the Second Coming. *Not all* Christians will die – some will be alive when Christ returns – *but all* will be transformed. The body in its present form simply cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Instead, when Christ returns, the dead will be raised with glorified bodies, and the saints who are alive at the time will likewise be transformed (without experiencing death). This will all occur in an instant. The same idea is expressed in 1 Thess. 4:16-17.

3. Paul notes that when this occurs, death will have been swallowed up in victory, and then, using Hos. 13:14, he taunts death in v. 55 in light of that certain event: "Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?" Death has been defeated and rendered impotent by the Lord Jesus Christ! The victory he gained over death at this first coming (e.g., 2 Tim. 1:10) is now realized in the fullest sense through the immortalization of his people.

4. Having mentioned death and sting, Paul interjects a theological note that the sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. I think he means that physical death only really stings for those who are in sin, those who are under condemnation for rebellion against the law of God. For them, death is entrance into an eternal judgment. For the righteous, the forgiven, the victorious in Christ, death is stingless. It is a passage to a blessed intermediate state and then eternal resurrection glory.

H. Exhortation not to be moved from this conviction (15:58) – ⁵⁸**So then, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.** Given the resurrection hope that he has so staunchly defended, Paul now urges them not to be moved from this conviction and constantly to give themselves to the work of the Lord, knowing that they are not pursuing a mirage. Ciampa and Rosner state (p. 839), "This whole chapter serves as a call to faithful Christian service in the assurance that comes from the resurrection – the assurance that sacrifices made for Christ and his kingdom are not made in vain, but will be richly rewarded in the fullness of that kingdom."

1. And beyond any independent rewards our labor may receive, I think all effective Christian service, all Christian labor that changes things in the direction of the eternal state, the new heaven and new earth, carries over into eternity as a kind of advance transformation. For example, to the extent we bring others to faith and build their devotion to God, their love for each other, and their unity with each other – to the extent we make them more like Christ – we are, in Paul's terminology in 1 Cor. 3:12, building with gold, silver, and precious stones. That is labor that will pass through the judgment with us, unlike building with wood, hay, or straw. It is something that

will not be stripped out as being of no eternal value, as being inconsistent with or irrelevant to God's eternal vision.

2. I love the image N. T. Wright employs when speaking about this (from his interview by Ben Witherington regarding *Surprised by Hope*):

We are not building the kingdom by our own efforts, no. The Kingdom remains God's gift, new creation, sheer grace. But, as part of that grace already poured out in Jesus Christ and by the Spirit, we are building FOR the kingdom. I use the image of the eleventh-century stonemason, probably illiterate, working away on one or two blocks of stone according to the orders given to him. He isn't building the Cathedral; he is building FOR the Cathedral. When the master mason/architect gathers up all the small pieces of stone at which people have been working away, he will put them into the great edifice which he's had in mind all along and which he alone can build – but FOR WHICH we can and must build in the present time. Note 1 Corinthians 3, the Temple-building picture, and the way it relates directly to 1 Cor 15.58: what you do in the Lord is NOT IN VAIN, because of the resurrection.

VII. Closing 16:1-24

A. Mechanics of collection for poor saints in Jerusalem (16:1-4) – **Now about the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also do. ²Every first day of the week, let each of you by himself put [something] aside, storing up whatever he is prospered, so that when I come there are not then collections. ³And when I arrive, whomever you approve, these I will send, by letters, to carry your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴And if it is fitting of me to go also, they will go with me.**

1. Regarding the mechanics of the collection Paul was taking up for the poor saints in Jerusalem, he directs the Corinthians to do as he had told the Galatian churches to do. Each of them is to save up every first day of the week an amount that is in accordance with whatever prosperity may have come their way that week.

a. Christians are called to share their wealth in the name of Christ. We must be willing to put our money on the line for Christ-glorifying purposes. The collection that churches take up on Sundays provides an opportunity to contribute toward a Christ-glorifying goal. There certainly are other Christ-glorifying uses of one's money, but if you're spending all your money on yourself, you've got to ask, "Have I not prospered at all?" If you have, your refusal to give is sinful; you are refusing to allow Christ to exercise his lordship over your finances.

b. Since Sunday, the first day of the week, was the day on which Christians, whether in Galatia or Corinth, regularly assembled to share the Lord's Supper and engage in other acts of worship, and since Paul's instruction is intended *to avoid* taking up a collection when he comes (probably to keep it clear that the money was not for Paul's support), it seems he is directing

the saints to set money aside each week by putting it in the church treasury, transferring it to the control of the church leaders. Ciampa and Rosner state (p. 843):

The first day of the week was, of course, the day on which Christ rose from the dead (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). Christians began to gather together to celebrate on that day sometime soon after that (John 20:19; Acts 20:7). The mention of the first day of every week along with the purpose that when I come no collections will have to be made suggests that the setting aside of money would not be just the setting apart within one's own possessions but the setting aside of the money by presenting it to the leaders of the church (cf. Acts 4:34-5:2).

2. When Paul arrives in Corinth, he will write letters of introduction for those the Corinthians approve to bring the gift to Jerusalem. If it is appropriate, he too will accompany them.

B. Travel plans (16:5-11) – **⁵And I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia) ⁶and may well stay awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way, wherever I go. ⁷For I do not want to see you now in passing, for I hope to stay some time with you, if the Lord permits. ⁸But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, ⁹for a great and effective door has opened to me, and those opposing are many.**

¹⁰Now whenever Timothy comes, see that he be without fear among you, for he is working the work of the Lord, as [am] I also. ¹¹No one, then, should treat him with contempt. But send him on his way in peace, that he may come to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers.

1. Paul informs them that he plans to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost and then to come to them by way of Macedonia. He had a great opportunity for evangelistic success in Ephesus, and not surprisingly, there were many who opposed him. This opposition culminated in the riot reported in Acts 19:23-41. The truth of Christ is opposed in this world, even when it is presented with the wisdom and tact of an apostle. It is the *message* that Satan seeks to silence.

2. As indicated in 1 Cor. 4:17, Paul had dispatched Timothy to Corinth. Paul wants to be sure that whenever Timothy arrives that he is properly received. There was tension between Paul and segments of the Corinthian church, and Paul is concerned that Timothy may be mistreated in some way.

3. Events that transpired after Paul sent 1 Corinthians led him to make an emergency visit to Corinth, which proved painful, to write the "severe letter" referred to in 2 Cor. 2:3-4, 7:8-12, and ultimately to write 2 Corinthians. But that is all for another study.

C. Apollos's return (16:12) – **¹²Now about Apollos, the brother, I urged him a lot so that he would go to you with the brothers, and it was not at all [his] will that he should come now, but he will come when he has opportunity.**

1. It seems that the Corinthians had requested that Apollos return to Corinth, and Paul was all for it. Despite how some had wrongly pitted them against each other, Paul joined their request and urged Apollos to return to Corinth.

2. Despite Paul's strong urging, Apollos was unwilling to return with the brothers from Corinth (Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus). Paul's advice was just that -- advice. It was not sinful for Apollos to refuse to heed it.

D. Concluding exhortations (16:13-18) – **¹³Keep alert; stand firm in the faith; act like a man; be strong. ¹⁴Let all your things be [done] in love.**

¹⁵Now I urge you, brothers - you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia and they appointed themselves to service to the saints - ¹⁶that you also submit yourselves to such men and to everyone who works with them and labors. ¹⁷But I am rejoicing over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus because they filled in your absence. ¹⁸For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore, recognize such men.

1. In vv. 13-14 Paul commands them to be on their guard against corrosive influences and to stand firm in the truth of the gospel. They are to be courageous and strong and to let love characterize all that they do.

2. In vv. 15-16 Paul urges them to submit to the household of Stephanas and to all who labor with them. Stephanas and his household were the first converts in the area and they gave themselves to ministry to the saints there. They were the ones presenting the Word to the people and for that reason were to be heeded. (Remember that much of Christian truth at that time was orally communicated. The Stephanas group were ministers in whom Paul had confidence.)

3. In vv. 17-18 Paul says that he rejoiced over the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus because they filled in the lack that he felt in being away from the church in Corinth. Their coming refreshed Paul's spirit, and he commends them to the church ("Therefore, recognize such men").

E. Final warning (16:19-24) – **¹⁹The churches of Asia greet you. Priscilla and Aquila greet you heartily in the Lord, along with the church that is in their house. ²⁰All the brothers greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.**

²¹The greeting [is] in my hand, Paul's. ²²If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be a cursed one. Our Lord, come!

²³The grace of the Lord Jesus [be] with you. ²⁴My love [be] with all of you in Christ Jesus.

1. The congregations in the region send their greetings to the Corinthian church, and Priscilla and Aquila add their personal hearty greeting, along with the church that gathered in their home. All the brothers in Paul's orbit in Ephesus include their greetings.

2. The command for the Christians to greet one another with a holy kiss is not a command to kiss per se. Rather, given that a kiss was a common form of greeting in the ancient world and in Judaism especially (see, e.g., Douglas Moo, *Romans*, 926), it is *assumed* they will greet by kissing.

a. The command is that the assumed kiss be a "*holy* kiss." In other words, Paul (also in Rom. 16:16; 2 Cor. 13:12; and 1 Thess. 5:26) is saying, "The kiss with which you greet one another is to be holy," meaning a kiss that is a genuine expression of Christian love (so also Peter who refers to a "kiss of love" in 1 Pet. 5:14). The greeting is not to be duplicitous, as was the kiss by Judas that betrayed our Lord. He is not addressing *whether* one must kiss as a greeting but are addressing *how*, assuming one will kiss, the greeting is to be done. This leaves room for different cultural forms of greetings, but all such greetings must comply with the command that they be holy or loving, that they be genuine.

b. It is as if a military commander wrote to his troops: "Greet President Trump with a *respectful* salute." His point would not be that they are to salute – that is the assumed form of military response – but that *when* they salute they do so with the respect that is due the office of President.

3. In v. 22 Paul offers one last warning to those who persist in deviating from his gospel, those who might refuse to obey the injunctions of this letter. He puts such disobedience in terms of love for the Lord. He says that if anyone does not love the Lord, let him be one who is cursed.

4. To this he adds, "Our Lord, come!" to reinforce the warning. Christ is indeed coming, and those who do not love him are under the curse and in danger of being rejected by him.

5. In his final words, he expresses his desire that the grace of the Lord Jesus be with them and declares his love for them.