

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

By Ashby L. Camp

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Introduction

In a poll conducted by Scripps Survey Research Center at Ohio University in April 2006, only 36 percent of the 1,007 adults interviewed answered "yes" to the question: "Do you believe that, after you die, your physical body will be resurrected someday?" Responding to the survey, Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and editor of the *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, lamented:

This reflects the very low state of doctrinal preaching in our churches. . . I continually am confronted by Christians, even active members of major churches, who have never heard this taught in their local congregations. . . . We have a lowest-common-denominator Christianity being taught in so many denominations that has produced a people who simply do not know some of the most basic Christian truths. Most Americans, when asked survey questions about religion, tend to answer in very theistic ways. They tend to affirm what they believe Christianity teaches. . . . Therefore, I have to conclude they simply do not know what orthodox Christianity teaches about the resurrection of the body.¹

The internationally respected New Testament theologian N. T. Wright notes the same problem in his recent book *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper, 2008) xi-xii:

At the first level, the book is obviously about death and about what can be said from a Christian perspective about what lies beyond it. . . . I approach the question as a biblical theologian, drawing on other disciplines but hoping to supply what they usually lack and what I believe the church needs to recapture: the classic Christian answer to the question of death and beyond, which these days is not so much disbelieved (in world and church alike) as simply not known. A survey of beliefs about life after death conducted in Britain in 1995 indicated that though more people believed in some kind of continuing life, only a tiny minority, even among churchgoers, believed in the classic Christian position, that of a future bodily resurrection.

The historic, orthodox Christian view

There is no doubt that belief in a bodily resurrection is the historic, orthodox Christian view. In his monumental work, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*

¹ See http://www.albertmohler.com/blog_read.php?id=600.

(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):

Just as in the New Testament, belief in the resurrection (the future resurrected life of believers, based foursquare on Jesus' own resurrection) was foundational to early Christianity in all the forms known to us except [the Gnostic forms from Nag Hammadi] we have just studied in section 7, which use 'resurrection' language in a clearly different way, drawing the key term from Christian linguistic usage but setting it within a radically different worldview. . . . Over against the standard pagan view, that death was certainly the end for the body (possibly the end of everything, possibly the gateway to a blissful immortality), Christianity affirmed, along with a substantial number of non-Christian Jews, the future bodily resurrection of all god's² people (and, in the view of many, of all people whether righteous or not). . . . 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, professor of theology at George W. Truett Theological Seminary, writes 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. . . .

² Wright explains at p. xviii why he sometimes does not capitalize God.

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."

John Cooper, professor of philosophical theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, writes in *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 8:

Virtually all Christian writers, even Origen, were adamant about defending the intrinsic goodness of the body as created by God against the anticorporeal doctrines of Gnosticism. In addition, very early the belief that the resurrection will be a general future event correlated with the return of Christ became the common Christian expectation. And virtually all early Christians seem to have agreed that persons both survive physical death and are resurrected to some form of bodily existence.

The early Christian consensus regarding the resurrection of the body is evident in the Apostles' Creed, the contents of which "are essentially an expansion of the positive form (the Old Roman Symbol) of the questions asked candidates for baptism at Rome at the end of the second century."³ That creed ends with "I believe . . . in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting." This belief was a regular feature of creeds up through the Reformation.

For example, the Athanasian Creed (late 5th or early 6th century) includes: "At His coming, all men are to arise with their own bodies; and they are to give an account of their own deeds. Those who have done good deeds will go into eternal life; those who have done evil will go into the everlasting fire."

Canon 1 of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) includes:

He [Jesus] will come at the end of the world to judge the living and the dead and will render to the reprobate and to the elect according to their works. Who all shall rise with their own bodies which they now have that they may receive according to their merits, whether good or bad, the latter eternal punishment with the devil, the former eternal glory with Christ.

³ Everett Ferguson, "Apostles' Creed" in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998) 90.

The Belgic Confession of 1561 includes:

Finally we believe, according to the Word of God, when the time appointed by the Lord (which is unknown to all creatures) is come, and the number of the elect complete, that our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, corporally and visibly, as he ascended, with great glory and majesty to declare himself judge of the quick and the dead; burning this old world with fire and flame, to cleanse it. And then all men will personally appear before this great judge, both men and women and children, that have been from the beginning of the world to the end thereof, being summoned by the voice of the archangel, and by the sound of the trumpet of God. For all the dead shall be raised out of the earth, and their souls joined and united with their proper bodies, in which they formerly lived. As for those who shall then be living, they shall not die as the others, but be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and from corruptible, become incorruptible. Then the books (that is to say the consciences) shall be opened, and the dead judged according to what they shall have done in this world, whether it be good or evil.

Chapter 32 of The Westminster Confession (1643-1646) declares:

I. The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption: but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them: the souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God, in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies. And the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day. Beside these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledges none.

II. At the last day, such as are found alive shall not die, but be changed: and all the dead shall be raised up, with the selfsame bodies, and none other (although with different qualities), which shall be united again to their souls forever.

III. The bodies of the unjust shall, by the power of Christ, be raised to dishonour: the bodies of the just, by His Spirit, unto honour; and be made conformable to His own glorious body.

Thomas Oden, the Henry Anson Buttz Professor of Theology and Ethics at Drew University, writes in volume 3 of his systematic theology *Life in the Spirit* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992) 397-398:

The Resurrection of the Body. It is an article of the creed to "believe in the resurrection of the body" (SCD 6, p.7). "We look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come" (Creed of the 150 Fathers, CC, p. 33). The point recurs in virtually every form of the rule of faith. The Faith of Damasus confessed more explicitly, "We believe that cleansed in his death and in his blood we are to be raised up by him on the last day in this body with which we now live" (SCD 15, p.11; cf. Creed of the Council of Toledo, SCD 20, p. 13).

On his return, the Lord is expected to call the dead from the grave to be raised up by the power of God. "I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live" (John 5:25; Tertullian, *On Resurrection*, ANF III, p. 572).

Defining Resurrection. Early preaching consisted in "proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead" (Acts 4:2). What Paul preached could be summarized simply as "Jesus and the resurrection" (Acts 17:18). To deny the resurrection is, according to Jesus, to have no knowledge of scripture (Matt. 22:29). It was the defining error of the Sadducees against which Jesus actively taught (Mark 12:18-23; Luke 20:27-33; Acts 23:6-8).

Resurrection (*anastasis*, a standing or rising up again, *egesis*, being raised up) is defined in the Eastern Orthodox *Longer Catechism* as that "act of the almighty power of God, by which all bodies of dead men, being reunited to their souls, shall return to life, and shall thenceforth be spiritual and immortal" (366, COC II, p. 502). "For if they define death as the separation of soul and body, resurrection surely is the re-union of soul and body" (John of Damascus, OF IV.27, NPNF 2 IX, p. 99). "All men shall rise again with their own bodies, which they now have, to receive according to their deeds" (Fourth Lateran Council). Resurrection means the reuniting of body and soul at the end of days. Resurrection is the action of God by which the bodies of all times and places, just and unjust alike, though reduced to dust, shall be restored to the souls from which they were separated by death, to be united for eternity in either nearness or distance from God (Pearson, *Creed*, art. XI; Wesleyan Church Articles of Religion, DSWT, p. 160; Liddon, *Easter in St. Paul's XXIII*).

Bodily resurrection is taught in the Scriptures

Belief in a bodily resurrection became the historic, orthodox Christian view because it is taught in the Scriptures. Jesus was, of course, raised bodily from the grave. That is why his body was not in the tomb (e.g., Mat. 28:5-7; Mk. 16:6; Lk. 24:1-6; Jn. 20:1-9). Other texts leave no doubt about the physicalness of his resurrection body (e.g., Mat. 28:9; Lk. 24:39-43; Jn. 2:19-22, 20:17, 20, 24-28; Acts 10:41).

The inference a few have drawn from Lk. 24:31b, 36 and Jn. 20:19, 26 that the Lord's resurrection body was essentially or customarily nonmaterial but capable of temporary materialization is unfounded. As explained by Francis Beckwith:

The fundamental problem with [this view] is that [it] confuses ontology with epistemology—that is, [it] confuses Biblical statements about the being of Jesus' resurrected body with Biblical statements about the knowledge of the observers of Jesus' resurrected body. All the "materialistic" passages concern the being of his body (e.g. "Touch me and understand, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" [Luke 24:39b]), while the "nonmaterialistic" passages concern the inability of the observers to see the risen Lord (e.g. "*He* disappeared from their sight" [Luke 24:31]). . . . Some of the materialistic passages [one proponent of the nonmaterial view] cites (and one that is not cited [John 2:19–21]) have Jesus saying he is a body of flesh and bones. Yet it is interesting to note that [the proponent] does not cite one nonmaterialistic passage in which Jesus says his body is immaterial; he merely cites passages in which Jesus cannot be seen. Granted that the nonmaterialistic passages tell us that Jesus' resurrected body is far different from an ordinary physical body (i.e. it is an immortal "spiritual" body), it is a logical *non sequitur* to say from this fact that it follows that Jesus' body is not physical.⁴

Unlike others who were brought back to life (1 Ki. 17:22; 2 Ki. 4:32-35; Mk. 5:35-43 [and parallels]; Lk. 7:11-16; Jn. 11:1-45; Acts 9:37-40, 20:9-10), Jesus was not simply resuscitated to live again as one subject to death. He was raised with a body that had been transformed into an immortal body of glory that was suited for eternity. Thus, Paul says in Rom. 6:9, "We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has mastery over him."

Christ's resurrection was the "firstfruits" of the end-time resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20-23). His resurrection serves as a pledge on God's part of the final end-time harvest.⁵ Our resurrection is tied to his, so much so that in 2 Cor. 4:14 Paul says "we

⁴ Francis J. Beckwith, "Identity and Resurrection: A Review Article," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (1990), 372. See also, Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 610-613; Frank Thielman, *Philippians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1995) 208; Norman Geisler, *The Battle for the Resurrection*, updated ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992) 118-120, 215-218.

⁵ As David Garland explains in *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 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:

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.

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).

Moreover, in Mat. 10:28 the Lord told the disciples, "And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But instead fear the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell." This makes clear that the punishment of hell is experienced in a bodily state. The same idea is expressed in Mat. 5:29-30. Since those who come out of their graves to a resurrection of judgment (Jn. 5:28-29; see also, Acts 24:14-15) do so bodily, and since the resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteous is nowhere distinguished in terms of its bodily nature, it is apparent that those who come out of their graves to a resurrection of life also do so bodily.

The bodily nature of the resurrection also is evident in 1 Cor. 6:12-17, where Paul rejects the effort of some in Corinth to rationalize having sex with prostitutes.⁶ They justified that behavior on the basis that the body was created for sex and that the physical was merely temporary so it could not be of consequence to God. To support this idea, they apparently were taking comments Paul had made regarding freedom from dietary restrictions and applying them to sexual restrictions.

The Corinthians were quick to adopt Paul's comment that "all things are lawful for me," but they were misusing it. Not only had he said that in the context of eating "idol meat" sold in the marketplace (see 10:23-26), a morally neutral matter, but it also needed to be qualified even in that context. Paul does not dispute the statement (because he said it),

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).

⁶ See, e.g., Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 250-251; Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1994) 125-127; Craig Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 56-58.

but he adds the necessary qualifications that not all things are beneficial and that he will not be mastered by anything. Just because something is lawful does not mean that it is always right to do it. When the exercise of one's freedom will damage another person, one needs to abstain from the conduct one otherwise is free to do. This is developed in 1 Corinthians 8–10.

Regarding the freedom to eat meat previously sacrificed to idols, Paul may have said something like "The food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, and God will do away with both the one and the other." That would be consistent with his view of the immortal, resurrected body as having no need for the stomach and food for continued life. Then again, this may be a purely Corinthian formulation, one with which Paul essentially agrees. Whatever the source, the Corinthians were applying this slogan to the body's sexual appetite, and Paul flatly rejects that application.

The Corinthian argument apparently went like this: (a) All things are permitted for satisfying one's appetite for food. After all, the stomach and food were created for one another. The stomach and food have no eternal significance because God is going to do away with them both in the end. (b) By analogy, all things are permitted for satisfying one's appetite for sex. After all, the body and sexual release were created for one another. The body and sexual release have no eternal significance because God is going to do away with them both in the end.

Paul denies their argument at both points: the body was *not* created for sexual release but for the Lord (and he adds that the Lord is for the body to maintain a parallel with their argument) and the body is *not* destined for destruction but for resurrection, the proof of which is the Lord's resurrection. The body was created for the Lord in the sense that the work of redemption includes the whole person, which includes the body. The body is not irrelevant for future existence; it is destined for resurrection and therefore is "for the Lord" in the present. The Lord is for the body in the sense that he gave himself for the body as part of his redemptive work. In vv. 15-17 Paul applies his reformulation of their slogan, "the body is *not* for fornication but for the Lord," to their going to prostitutes.

The bodily nature of the resurrection promised at Christ's return is confirmed by the fact the Lord's resurrection was followed by the bodily resurrection or reanimation of selected Old Testament saints (Mat. 27:52-53).⁷ Whether those saints were genuinely resurrected or merely revived like Lazarus, their rising bodily in association with the Lord's resurrection certainly testifies to the effect of his resurrection on the bodies of the dead. It foreshadows our bodily resurrection in association with Christ's (1 Cor. 15:23).

⁷ As Craig Blomberg notes in *Matthew*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992) 421, Mat. 27:52-53 probably should be punctuated, "The tombs also were opened. And the bodies of many holy people who had fallen asleep were raised, and having come from the tombs after his resurrection, they entered the holy city and appeared to many."

This is all clear enough in its own right, but when put in the context of the first century the attempt to define the resurrection hope as something other than the restoration of bodily life is hard to take seriously.⁸ As Wright states:

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*. While Herod reportedly thought Jesus might be John the Baptist raised from the dead, he didn't think he was a ghost. 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.⁹

Those who deny that the resurrection is physical or corporeal often are misled by an incorrect understanding of 1 Cor. 15:44. Paul does not say in that verse that our natural bodies will be transformed into "*spirits*"; he says they will be transformed into "*spiritual bodies*."¹⁰ They are bodies that have been transformed so as to be suitable for

⁸ This is not to deny that "resurrection" could be used metaphorically; it is to claim that its literal meaning was a bodily resurrection and that any metaphorical usage derived from that meaning. Without contextual indicators to the contrary, resurrection would be understood to refer to the restoration of bodily life.

⁹ *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper, 2008) 36.

the eternal state. They are "spiritual" not in the sense of noncorporeal (made of spirit), which would be an oxymoron given the inherent physicalness of "body," but in the sense of supernatural, in the sense they are imperishable, glorious, and powerful. This is recognized by a broad range of scholarly commentators.¹¹ Gordon Fee, for example, states:

[T]he two adjectives "natural" (*psychikos*) and "spiritual" (*pneumatikos*) are used with the noun "body" (*soma*) to describe its present earthly and future heavenly expressions respectively. . . .

[T]hey 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," . . .

The transformed body, therefore, is not composed of "spirit"; it is a *body* adapted to the eschatological existence that is under the ultimate domination of the Spirit.¹²

N. T. Wright likewise states:

[F]rom the start within early Christianity it was built in as part of the belief in resurrection that the new body, though it certainly will 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. . . .

It is of course Paul, in a much misunderstood passage in 1 Corinthians 15, who sets this out most clearly and to whom many, though not

¹⁰ Physicalness is an inherent aspect of *so,ma* ("body") in Paul's usage. Robert Gundry writes in *So,ma in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1987) 168: "Contrary to all this, however, runs Paul's exceptionless use of *so,ma* 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 *so,ma*. . . . The consistent and exclusive use of *soma* for the physical body in anthropological contexts resists dematerialization of the resurrection, whether by idealism or by existentialism."

¹¹ See, e.g., C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1968) 372-373; Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 785-786; Richard Oster, *1 Corinthians*, College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995) 398-399; Craig Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 132.

¹² Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 785-786.

all, subsequent writers look back. He speaks of two sorts of body, the present one and the future one. He uses two key adjectives to describe these two bodies. Unfortunately, many translations get him radically wrong at this point, leading to the widespread supposition that for Paul the new body would be a spiritual body in the sense of a nonmaterial body, a body that in Jesus' case wouldn't have left an empty tomb behind it. It can be demonstrated in great detail, philologically and exegetically, that this is precisely not what Paul meant. The contrast he is making is not between what we would mean by a present physical body and what we would mean by a future spiritual one, but between a present body animated by the normal human soul and a future body animated by God's spirit.¹³

Another stumbling block to a proper understanding of this subject is 1 Cor. 15:50. Paul's 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 without first being transformed into imperishable, glorious, powerful, and immortal bodies. As Craig Blomberg explains, "'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)."¹⁴ Wright likewise states:

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.¹⁵

Recognition by modern theologians

The physical nature of the resurrection body is recognized by a wide range of modern theologians. Here is a sampling in reverse chronological order.

Thomas Schreiner, the James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, writes in *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) 107:

Perhaps those questioning the resurrection in 1 Cor. 15 were similar to the opponents in 2 Timothy. In insisting that there was no resurrection of the

¹³ N. T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper, 2008) 43-44.

¹⁴ Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1994) 316.

¹⁵ N. T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper, 2008) 156.

dead (1 Cor. 15:12), they probably taught that a future physical resurrection was a fantasy (cf. 1 Cor. 15:35). They may have believed that the only resurrection that believers receive is the spiritual resurrection in which believers are raised with Christ (Eph. 2:6; Col. 3:1), dismissing a future physical resurrection because such a notion was repulsive to the Greek mind. . . .

For Paul, belief in the future resurrection of believers is nonnegotiable. Those who reject the future physical resurrection of believers also deny the physical resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:13, 15-16), even if they claim to support the latter. The two are inseparable for Paul, so that one cannot trumpet the resurrection of Christ and at the same time dismiss the future resurrection of believers.

N. T. Wright, Bishop of Durham in the Church of England, writes in *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003) 372:

[Paul] believed . . . in the future bodily resurrection of all true people of the true God, and he cautiously explored, here and there, ways of referring to the intermediate state which was the necessary corollary of such a belief. . . .

. . . [Paul] believed, and articulated in considerable detail, that the resurrection would not only be bodily (the idea of a non-bodily resurrection would have been as much an oxymoron to him as it would to both Jews and pagans of his day; whether you believed in resurrection or not, the word meant bodies), but that it would involve *transformation*. The present body is corruptible, decaying and subject to death; but death, which spits in the face of the good creator God, cannot have the last word. The creator will therefore make a new world, and new bodies, proper to the age to come.

Jack Cottrell, Professor of Theology at Cincinnati Christian University, 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).¹⁶ See 2 Cor 5:1-5.

¹⁶ Cottrell writes in *Romans Volume 1*, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996) 493: "The phrase 'redemption of our bodies' has two important implications. First, physical bodies are a natural and necessary part of human existence. We are not complete human beings without them; our

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.

Joseph Plevnik, Professor of Sacred Scripture at Regis College, writes in *Paul and the Parousia: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997) 161:

The corporeal aspect of the resurrection is indicated in the second question asked in v. 35: "With what kind of body do they come [Greek text omitted]?" This is not a new question but a specification of the preceding question, "How are the dead raised?" As H.-H. Schade has observed, the somatic character of the resurrection is here taken for granted. The entire argumentation that follows deals with the *difference* in the body – between the present body and the resurrection body. The question concerns the kind of body, not whether there will be a body at the resurrection of the dead.

James Leo Garrett, Distinguished Professor of Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, writes in volume 2 of *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical & Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 690-691:

What do Christians today understand and affirm concerning eschatological resurrection? . . .

3. *Bodily Resurrection, Not a Continued Noncorporeal Existence*

Eschatological resurrection is to be raising from the dead in a body rather than a continued noncorporeal existence. It was spoken of as the coming forth (*ekporeusontai*) of those who are "in the graves" (John 5:28-29), KJV, TEV) and a raising at "the last day" (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54). Paul did not hesitate to refer to the resurrected state as being in a "body" (*so,ma*) (1 Cor. 15:35, 37, 38, 40, 44).

4. *Full Redemption of the Body*

spirits are naked without their bodies (2 Cor 5:1-5). Contrary to most religions, we are not redeemed *from* our bodies; our bodies themselves are redeemed."

Eschatological resurrection is to effect the complete redemption or ransoming of the human body (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14; 4:30). Jesus came to liberate human beings from the bondage of "the fear of death" (Heb. 2:14-15). Final resurrection will bring about "the deliverance of the whole person from the dominion of death."

Wayne Grudem, Research Professor of Bible and Theology at Phoenix Seminary, writes in *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 828, 832:

When Christ redeemed us he did not just redeem our spirits (or souls) -- he redeemed us as whole persons, and this includes the redemption of our bodies. Therefore the application of Christ's work of redemption to us will not be complete until our bodies are entirely set free from the effects of the fall and brought to that state of perfection for which God created them. In fact, the redemption of our bodies will only occur when Christ returns and raises our bodies from the dead. But at this present time, Paul says that we wait for "*the redemption of our bodies*," and then adds, "for in this hope we were saved (Rom. 8:23-24). . . .

We may therefore define *glorification* as follows: *Glorification is the final step in the application of redemption. It will happen when Christ returns and raises from the dead the bodies of all believers for all time who have died, and reunites them with their souls, and changes the bodies of all believers who remain alive, thereby giving all believers at the same time perfect resurrection bodies like his own. . . .*

In conclusion, when Christ returns he will give us new resurrection bodies to be like his resurrection body. "When he appears *we shall be like him*" (1 John 3:2; this statement is true not only in an ethical sense but also in terms of our physical bodies; cf. 1 Cor. 15:49; also Rom. 8:29).

George Ladd, who was Professor of New Testament Exegesis and Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, writes in *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 609-610:

Paul has more to say about the resurrection than any other writer in the New Testament. Redemption applies to the whole person, including the body (Rom. 8:23). Paul often contrasts the sufferings of earthly existence with the future glory (Rom. 8:18), but he never considers bodily life in itself an evil thing from which he longs to be freed. Rather than being discarded, the body, which often humiliates us, is to be transformed and glorified (Phil. 3:21). The Holy Spirit who has quickened our spirits will also give fullness of life to our mortal bodies in the resurrection (Rom. 8:11). Paul's doctrine of the resurrection is grounded in his unitary view of humanity.

We have seen, however, that as Paul reflected on death, he could not conceive that even death could separate the believer from the love of God. To be absent from the body means to be at home with the Lord, apparently as a disembodied spirit. However, this is not what Paul longs for. The intermediate state, although one of blessing, is not the goal of salvation. The consummation of salvation and the full possession of our inheritance at the resurrection (Eph. 1:14) await the return of Christ when God will "bring with him those who have fallen asleep" (1 Thess. 4:14). Then the spirits of the dead will be reunited with their bodies, but transformed, glorified. Paul knows nothing of glorified spirits apart from the body. The problem that called forth his long discussion of the resurrection was some form of denial of the resurrection body (1 Cor. 15:12, 35). If Paul had taught some form of blessed immortality of the soul or resurrection of the spirit out of its entanglement in the world of matter into the realm of God, the Corinthians would have had no problem. They have difficulty accepting the bodily resurrection. . . .

. . . Paul's "spiritual body," then, is a new body that stands in some kind of real continuity with the physical body, which will yet be different because it has been transformed by the Holy Spirit and made like the glorious body of the resurrected Jesus (Phil. 3:21). The physical body was of dust, like Adam's body; the spiritual body will be heavenly, like Christ's body (1 Cor. 15:45-49); but it is still a body.

Robert Gundry, Scholar-in-Residence at Westmont College, writes in *So,ma in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) 182:

We cannot, then, excise from Pauline theology the indication in Phil 3:20-1 that the resurrection of Christ was just as somatic as that of Christians will be. Rather, those verses say explicitly what we should naturally deduce from 1 Corinthians 15, Rom 8:11, and other passages, viz., that the raising of Jesus from the dead was a raising of his physical body. Neither excision of the relevant texts nor reinterpretation of *so,ma* can lay rightful claim to carry out the ultimate intention of Paul. Quite clearly, that intention included a substantival category: the resurrection of Christ was and the resurrection of Christians will be physical in nature. Anything less than that undercuts Paul's ultimate intention that redeemed man possess physical means of concrete activity for the eternal service and worship of God in a restored creation. Otherwise, God's purpose in the creation – material as it is – would be thwarted. To dematerialize resurrection, by any means, is to emasculate the sovereignty of God in both creative purpose and redemptive grace.

John Murray, who was Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, writes in *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 291-292:

[T]his resurrection is defined in terms of "making alive your mortal bodies". Since this refers to the resurrection from the dead we might have expected the apostle to say "dead bodies" rather than "mortal bodies" (cf. vs. 10). But the language is significant. The term "mortal" describes the bodies of believers from the aspect of the mortality that belongs to them in this life prior to the event of death. And, although it is as dead bodies they will be made alive at the resurrection, yet the identification of them as "mortal bodies" shows that it is the same bodies which believers now possess that will be made alive at the resurrection. The identity and continuity are intimated in the description which the apostle here adopts, identity and continuity in no way interfering with the newness of quality by which these same bodies will be fitted for the resurrection state (cf. 1 Cor. 15:35-54).

The purpose of bodily resurrection

Some people object to a bodily resurrection because of an incorrect belief that the eternal state, the consummated kingdom of God, will be "spiritual" in the sense of noncorporeal. They reason from that faulty premise that God can have no purpose in raising the dead bodily. But as N. T. Wright says, "[T]here are several promises in the New Testament about God's people 'reigning,' and these cannot just be empty words. If, as we have already seen, the biblical view of God's future is of the renewal of the entire cosmos, there will be plenty to be done, entire new projects to undertake."¹⁷ Wayne Grudem puts the matter more fully:

We as resurrected men and women will live forever in "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet. 3:13). We will live in a renewed earth that "will be set free from its bondage to decay" (Rom. 8:21) and become like a new Garden of Eden. . . . In this very material, physical, renewed universe, it seems that we will need to live as human beings with physical bodies, suitable for life in God's renewed physical creation. Specifically, Jesus' physical resurrection body affirms the goodness of God's original creation of man not as a mere spirit like the angels, but as a creature with a physical body that was "very good." We must not fall into the error of thinking that nonmaterial existence is somehow a better form of existence for creatures: when God made us as the pinnacle of his creation, he gave us physical bodies.¹⁸

¹⁷ N. T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper, 2008) 161.

¹⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 613.