

The Heavenly Human Being

Hebrews 2:9, 17; 1 Corinthians 15:35-57

INTRODUCTION:

- Hebrews 2:9 -- Jesus's *humanity* emphasized for sacrifice (v. 9, 17); but also for “high priest” service, which is ongoing at the Father's side (v. 18; 4:15). I have said a few times that Jesus *continues* to be a human being in that service.
- This has raised questions, and perhaps disturbed some. It seems to diminish Jesus' heavenly glory if we claim that he still lives in a *human* body.
- Also, our common sense is that human bodies cannot exist in heaven -- they must be “changed” for life in that realm, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15.
- This lesson, therefore, examines Paul's teachings in 1 Corinthians 15 regarding the sort of bodies we will have as a result of The Resurrection of the Dead.
- *Why bother with this?* What does it matter what we understand about this?
 - This is a matter on which opinions among sincere, saved disciples of Jesus will differ.
 - Whether we have perfect understanding on this is not a “salvation issue.”
 - *However*, as it affects *how we behave*, it may have “salvation” implications. That is why Paul takes up this matter in 1 Corinthians. What they believed--mistakenly--about the resurrection and about the human body--influenced them to behave in the problematic ways Paul treats throughout the letter. In fact, it led them **to deny something that is a “salvation issue”**: **that Jesus himself was raised bodily from the dead**. So, 1 Cor. 15:1, 2; 58.
- **We will see that Paul teaches that our bodies in heaven will still be *human* bodies, but they will have been “changed” in ways that make them suitable for life in the presence of God for eternity.**

STUDY of 1 Corinthians 15:35-57

1. Paul is answering our question.

- a. "...With what kind of body do they come?" (v. 35)
 - It was fashionable in societies such as Corinth to view the body--in fact, "earthly," "natural" existence--as something to escape; that death *liberates* the eternal soul from the body of flesh that only holds it down.
 - This view of the nature of nature remains very influential in today's Church. For example, the hymn "I'll Fly Away."
- b. Some of the Corinthians were denying The Resurrection of the Dead (v. 12).
 - "Resurrection" = that God will raise our dead bodies to eternal life when Jesus comes.
 - They appear to have understood "resurrection" in a *spiritual* sense -- something like "new life in Christ," "born again," etc.
- c. They appear not to have understood that they therefore *also denied* that Jesus was raised (v. 13).
 - By pointing out this connection, Paul begins to argue that what will happen to us in eternity has *physical* connections to what happened to Jesus. That is, Jesus' resurrection demonstrates a new nature of "nature" in the glorified life God will give in the day of The Resurrection of the Dead.
 - We will trace Paul's teaching by focusing on three metaphors he uses: firstfruits (or, first fruits), bodily transformation of seed, and changing clothes.

2. "Firstfruits" (vv. 20-22): What is true of Jesus in his resurrection experience will be true of us at The Resurrection of the Dead.

- a. Harvest imagery.
 - The Law required offerings be made from the first portion of the crop that was harvested (Num. 18:12, 13, "first ripe").
 - This represented gratitude for "more like this to come." In other words, "firstfruits" is identical to what is harvested later.
- b. To explain Jesus as *antitype* (~answer) to Adam, vv. 22-23.
 - The Adam / Christ comparison: **change in the nature of things** (Rom. 5:12).

- “by a man came death” (1 Cor. 15:22) = the *possibility* of death became part of *human nature*.
 - Likewise, Jesus' resurrection introduces the *possibility* of bodily life beyond death: “so in Christ all shall be made alive,” (v. 22).
- c. Notice the hopeful transformation here:
- Death for Adam's human nature is represented by the Grim Reaper. (also harvest imagery)
 - Eternal life for the risen Jesus's human nature is represented by “firstfruits” (more to come!).
3. “What you sow is not the body that is to be,” (vv. 36-49): Physical continuity and identity of the resurrection body with our present body, yet great transformation.
- a. To the seed “you sow” “God gives a body as he has chosen,” *after* “[the seed] dies” (v. 36-38a).
- b. One body per “kind” of seed--unique “glory” (vv. 38b-41)
- **“one kind for humans”** (v. 39)
 - Recall Genesis 1:11, the law of “kind”
 - Acorn seed produces oak trees; human seed produces humans.
- c. **“So it is with the resurrection of the dead,”** (v. 42a)
- We usually think of “human seed” in the context of *reproduction*, but here Paul guides us to think of “human seed” in the context of *resurrection*.
 - “Human seed” is “planted” in the grave. What comes out of the grave in The Resurrection? **Humans! *But not the same “human” glory this time...***
- d. God will give that “human seed” a **“spiritual”** *human* body (vv. 42b-44)
- I.e., “incorruptible,” glorified (cp. to “dishonor”), “power,” “spiritual”
 - “Spiritual” indicates *suited for eternal, heavenly life with God*.
For example, Paul draws a similar contrast in 1 Cor. 2:14. There it is not bodily nature but quality of mind Paul has in view. Because of the present help of the Holy Spirit, Christians attending and submitting to the “words...taught by the Spirit” are “those who are spiritual,” (v. 13). Their

minds are *able* to understand due to the transformation of mind (Rom. 12:2) effected by the Spirit through the word of God. This is the difference between “spiritual” (*pneumatikos*) and “natural” (*psychikos*): the effectual presence of the Spirit with one and not the other to make the mind suitable for discerning “spiritual truths” (1 Cor. 2:13).

Therefore, in the Resurrection of the Dead the body is given those qualities that make it suitable for eternal life in Heaven. We instinctively understand this idea of “suitability.” Think of the many variations on the theme of aliens visiting Earth; beings we imagine as superior to ourselves, because they come from some other planet (e.g., Superman).

The next step in Paul’s explanation (3.e. below) adds the life-giving work of the Holy Spirit, which accounts for why the resurrection glory of the human body is “spiritual.”

- **Key:** “it is raised in...,” and “it” is *the physical body that is the “seed.”*
 - Such a thing as a “spiritual body” is an oxymoron to the Corinthians, “spiritual” just did not apply to the physical body; yet, Paul here clearly melds the two into one thing in naming the “glory” of the resurrection human body.
- e. The resurrection human body is the “heavenly” human body (vv. 45-49).
- This is how Paul accounts for the spiritual human body being given to the human seed that died.
 - Another Adam / Christ comparison; therefore, talking about the respective “natural” and “spiritual” *human* natures. (Recall, re: vv. 21, 22 in 2 above.)
 - v. 45a references Gen. 2:7. That Adam's kind of human “glory” is a union of body and spirit (represented by God *breathing* life into Adam). A Genesis 2 way of representing “in [God’s] image” from Genesis 1:26.
 - v. 45b: “the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.” **The point: the resurrection life given by Jesus mirrors image of the life we have now “in Adam.”** (Recall v. 22, “in Christ all will be made alive.) I.e., Jesus is the *source* of life, because He sent the Spirit (Rom. 8:11). So, The Resurrection is the fullness of that “pledge” of eternal life (Eph. 2:12, 13).
 - **Because Jesus will *breathe life* into our “human seed” bodies in the Resurrection, we will have “heavenly” human bodies *like was seen in the case of Jesus*, “the second human [*anthropos*]” (cp. to first “glory” of the “human” kind, Adam) (vv. 47-48).**
 - Therefore, the body as it will be raised “spiritual” is also “heavenly” (v. 49b): **“we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.”**

4. Changing clothes (vv. 50-53): In light of the physical continuity and personal identity of the resurrection body with the “seed” body, the “change” from one to the other is like dressing the same body in different clothes.
 - a. **“flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,”** (v. 50a).
 - Paul identifies the heart of the Corinthians’ misunderstanding regarding resurrection “spiritual body” in the case of The Resurrection of the Dead and, by implication, in the case of Jesus’s resurrection. I.e., this is the reason for their skeptical question Paul voices in verse 36. (Recall 1.a & b above.)
 - This (v. 50a) is like saying that the “perishable” could “inherit the imperishable” (v. 50b).
 - The Corinthians would shout “Amen!” thinking Paul had just tripped up his argument for physical heavenly existence in the resurrection human body.
 - b. The resurrection will be as though the Adam-nature of the human body is given the glorious new clothes of the Jesus-nature of the human body to “put on.” “shall be changed” (vv. 51, 52) = “this perishable / mortal body [is] **to put on** imperishability / immortality” (v. 53).
 - c. For example: space suits are required to make our present bodies “suitable” for outer space life. (Not to imply that Heaven is merely somewhere in outer space.)
 - d. In other words, the reason “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” is not because “flesh and blood” is physical in nature, but because physical nature *presently* suffers The Curse of corruptibility, dishonor, weakness. These are consequences of Adam’s sin. In The Resurrection of the Dead, bodies will be “changed” to no longer suffer The Curse. So, Paul’s next and final move is to represent God’s *redemption*, not just of our moral record (forgiveness) but also of our physical bodies.
5. God will have “swallowed” Death (vv. 54-57): The raising of dead bodies now with “spiritual,” “heavenly” clothing is the final blow against all of God’s enemies and completes God’s historic plan of redemption in Jesus.
 - a. “Death is swallowed up in victory,” (v. 54).
 - Verse 54 quote is from Isa. 25:8.
 - As though God *ate* Death -- it is consumed, it no longer exists.
 - Recall 1 Cor. 15:26: The Resurrection is the final and full destruction of Death.

b. The fulfillment of Redemption (vv. 55-57)

- Jesus Christ gives victory over sin and the Law through *his death* on the cross (see Col. 2:13, 14).
- Jesus gives victory over Death through *his resurrection* (i.e., “firstfruits,” etc.).
A new glory for the human kind of body.
- Not only the human body, but Jesus’s victory is the redemption of *all* physical existence: Gen. 3:15, 17 is resolved, as expressed in Romans 8:18-23, because of Jesus’s resurrection. (Romans 8:23 “redemption of our bodies” is when the creation, too, is relieved of The Curse. In other words, both “groanings” [by the creation as well as by us] are resolved when Jesus comes, which is the day of The Resurrection of the Dead [1 Thess. 4:16, 17].)

CONCLUSION:

The human body we have now will be raised with a new “glory” for human nature. Freed from The Curse, we will live as Jesus-nature humans in bodies suited for eternal life in Heaven: incorruptible, immortal, powerful, glorified, and therefore *spiritual*.