

First Epistle to the Corinthians

30 – Essay Five: Resurrection (5.4) – Nature of Resurrected Body

1 Corinthians 15:35-50

1. Outlines

- a. *ESV Study Bible*
 - i. The Futility of Faith If the Dead Are Not Raised (15:1–58)
 1. The truthfulness of the traditions about Christ’s resurrection (15:1–11)
 2. Christ’s resurrection and the resurrection of believers (15:12–34)
 3. The nature of the resurrection body (15:35–58)
- b. *Reading the New Testament: Reading Corinthians*
 - i. The Human Transformation Yet to Come
 1. A Reminder of Christ’s Resurrection (vv.1-11)
 2. Corinthian Assertions and Pauline Responses (vv.12-34)
 3. Corinthian Questions and Pauline Answers (vv.35-58)
- c. *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle*
 - i. The Resurrection of Believers
 1. The Basis—The Resurrection of Christ (vv.1-11)
 2. The Certainty of Resurrection (vv.12-34)
 - a. If Christ is NOT raised (vv.12-19)
 - b. But Christ IS raised (vv.20-28)
 - c. Ad hominem arguments for resurrection (vv.29-34)
 3. The Resurrection Body (vv.35-49)
 - a. Analogies of seeds and “bodies” (vv.35-44)
 - b. Analogy of Adam and Christ (vv.45-49)
 4. The Assurance of Triumph (vv.50-58)
- d. Bailey¹
 - i. Resurrection: The Message and Validity of Faith (vv.1-20)
 - ii. Resurrection: Adam and Christ (vv.21-28)
 - iii. Resurrection and Ethics (vv.29-34)
 - iv. Resurrection: Adam and Christ (vv.35-50)
 - v. Resurrection: Victory (vv.51-58)

2. Rhetoric

- a. Extended intro section (1-6)
 - i. Multiple analogies of “bodies” and “glory”
- b. Segment 6 is duo-directional (serves as end of part one and start of part two)
- c. Second part (6-12) is 7-part ring-composition
 - i. The difference between physical/natural and spirit-filled/spiritual
 - ii. Multiple comparisons between two types of “bodies”
 - iii. The main point is the necessity of transformation
 - iv. Center is segment 9 – the two Adams

¹ Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians*, loc. 4971.

Table 1: Bailey, location 5362

1 Corinthians 15:35-50 (ESV)		
1	35 But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?"	How are the dead raised?
2	36 You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37 And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. 38 But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.	Plants
3	39 For not all flesh is the same [flesh], but there is one kind for humans, another [flesh] for animals, another [flesh] for birds, and another for fish.	Humans, animals, birds, fish
4	40 There are heavenly [celestial] bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly [celestial] is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another.	Glory of heavenly and earthly
5	41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.	Glory of heavenly bodies
6	42 So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable.	So the resurrection perishable imperishable
7	43 It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.	Weakness to glory and power
8	44 It is sown a natural [physical] body; it is raised a spiritual [spirit-filled] body. If there is a natural [physical] body, there is also a spiritual [spirit-filled] body.	Physical spirit filled
9	45 Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.	1st Adam received life 2nd Adam gives life
10	46 But it is not the spiritual [spirit-filled] that is first but the natural [physical], and then the spiritual [spirit-filled]. 47 The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.	Physical spirit filled
11	48 As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. 49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, <u>we shall</u> [let us ²] also bear the image of the man of heaven.	Dust to image of Christ
12	50 I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.	Perishable imperishable

² *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle, 15:48-49*; also *Greek NT Byzantine* shows this as aorist tense.

These ten verses [vv.35-44] assemble a wide variety of materials as Paul continues to argue in behalf of the reality of the resurrection of the dead. Here, Paul offers a collage of data as he quotes the LXX, alludes to stories from Genesis, and develops analogies related to seed, flesh, body and glory, and Adam.³

3. Part 1 (sections 1-6)

- a. Paul gets to the heart of why the Corinthians had issues with the concept of a resurrection

But almost certainly lurking behind that denial [of a resurrection] is a view of the material order that found the resurrection of material bodies (or dead corpses) to be a doctrine most foul.⁴

... Because they could not handle the *how*, they had given up the *that* —the resurrection itself.⁵

- b. Two questions at the heart of the matter

- i. How are the dead raised?

1. *UBC* and *RNT*⁶: answered in vv.50-57
2. *Bailey*: answered in vv.36-42
3. *NICNT*: no clear division

- ii. What kind of bodies do the raised have?

1. *UBC* and *RNT*: answered in vv.36-49
2. *Bailey*: answered in vv.42-50
3. *NICNT*: no clear division

- c. Center section (2-5) – parables or analogies

- i. First point to emphasize – Paul isn't discussing the necessity of death, per se

Quite in contrast to those who think Paul's major point in the argument is that believers must die in order to be raised, his concern in fact is that transformation must take place in order for believers, whether dead or alive, to enter into heavenly existence: "This corruptible must be clothed with incorruptibility."⁷

Paul's concern is with death as the precondition of life, not in the sense that all must die but in the sense that the seed itself demonstrates that out of death a new expression of life springs forth.⁸

- ii. The parable of the plant:

1. A plant, in order to become a living, growing plant, must "die" from its seed form so that the growth may occur
2. Although the seed and plant have very different appearances, there is continuity, that is, it is still the same plant
3. God gives each type of existence the proper kind of body

The one "life" is in two modes, one before and one after death and resurrection.⁹

- iii. Parable of living creatures

³ *Understanding the Bible Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, "49. Comparing Bodies and Seeds", 1 Cor. 15:35-44.

⁴ *NICNT*, "3. The Resurrection Body (15:35-58)".

⁵ *NICNT*, 15:35.

⁶ *Reading the New Testament: Reading Corinthians*.

⁷ *NICNT*, "3. The Resurrection Body (15:35-58)".

⁸ *NICNT*, 15:36-37.

⁹ *NICNT*, 15:36-37.

1. Most English translations omit the repetition of “flesh” (*sarx*)
 2. For creatures (including humans) in the present state of things, the flesh is the type of body given by God
 3. But even though they are all “flesh” they are also different from one another
- iv. Parable of heavenly and earthly bodies
1. “Heavenly” means “celestial” as in the sun, moon, and stars
 2. Point is that both celestial and earth-bound objects all have “bodies”
 - a. Plants have certain kinds of bodies
 - b. Creatures have bodies of “flesh”
 - c. Celestial objects have their own body types
 3. This is not a scientific text!
 4. The ancients saw the rising and setting of celestial bodies as birth and death; e.g., a resurrection of the sun each morning¹⁰
 5. The concept of “glory” is introduced into the discussion
 6. The glory of the celestial is luminescence and beauty
 7. The glory of the earthly is of a different kind – it is honor (c.f., v.43)¹¹
- v. Parable of the heavenly bodies
1. Each type of celestial body exhibits a different kind of “glory”
 2. Even the stars are each different from another
- d. Closing of Part 1 (section 6)
- i. Paul expects his audience to draw the preceding analogies to a conclusion
 - ii. There are a great many varieties of “bodies” – flesh is just one type
 - iii. What is important is that even though bodies differ across time and space, the “being” is in continuity (just as the “being” of a plant remains the same from seed to harvest)
 - iv. God equips each “being” with its most appropriate body
 - v. The physical bodies of flesh that we have in the present will not be the bodies that we will have after the resurrection
4. Part 2 – sections 6-12
- a. Sections 6 and 12
- i. Picks up ideas from the first two parables (planting, flesh)
 - ii. Before resurrection our bodies are perishable; after resurrection we are given bodies that are imperishable
 - iii. Important because “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable”
 - iv. Our bodies must undergo transformation through resurrection (but this does not mean that all must die, c.f. v.51)

The first three sets of contrasts are intended to describe the essential differences between the “naked seed” and “the body that is to be” (v. 37)... The first set is primary, describing the essential difference between the present, earthly body and the future, heavenly one. As the Corinthians well know, the present body is subject to decay; indeed, in death it “is sown in a perishable state, ” which is precisely why they are disenchanted with it (cf. 6:13). But

¹⁰ Bailey, location 5425.

¹¹ Bailey, location 5430.

what they have failed to reckon with is the transformation that God will effect: "it is raised imperishable."¹²

b. Sections 7 and 11

- i. Picks up motifs from second set of parables (heaven/earth, glory)
- ii. The former in each pair should not be seen as "evil" but rather, inferior to the latter
 1. What is shameful in the present body will cease in the resurrected body
 2. What is weak in the present body will cease in the resurrected body

For Paul, it is not so much a pejorative term to describe the body as shameful, as it is a description of its present "lowly" state in comparison with its glorified one.¹³

- iii. Paul is building the argument that the reasons Corinthians have rejected a bodily resurrection will no longer exist in the resurrected body
- iv. Note precise parallels between 7 and 11¹⁴
 1. Dishonor – the first Adam's disobedience turned flesh back into perishable dust. The first Adam tried to blame God for his problems – shame.
 2. Glory – the second Adam demonstrated integrity, even at the cross. Those "who are of heaven" will have the character of Christ.
 3. Weakness – the first Adam had no ability to love perfectly. Likewise humans arrive in the world unable to love perfectly.
 4. Power – the second Adam loved perfectly. We can and must love perfectly. The resurrection provides the power to do so (v.45b, "the last Adam became a life-giving spirit") – in the present time.
 - a. Many translations place this in the future tense
 - b. *NICNT* and *Greek NT Byzantine* give this in the present or aorist tense

If Paul had written the future, "we shall bear," the case would be closed; the whole discussion would then involve the heavenly body and have to do only with the Eschaton. One can well understand, therefore, why the majority of those who have written on this passage opt for this reading. Nonetheless, the future is found in only a few disparate MSS and is easily accounted for on the very same grounds that it is now adopted by so many, while it is nearly impossible to account for anyone's having changed a clearly understandable future to the hortatory subjunctive so early and so often that it made its way into every textual history as the predominant reading. For that reason it must be the original, and if original it must be intentional on Paul's part as a way of calling them to prepare now for the future that is to be.¹⁵

c. Center sections 8-10

... The expression, "a spiritual body," would certainly have shocked the Corinthians, for whom body and spirit were clearly antithetical.¹⁶

¹² *NICNT*, 15:42-43.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Bailey, locations 5459-5465.

¹⁵ *NICNT*, 15:48-49.

¹⁶ *UBC*, 15:42-44.

- i. The principal objection of the Corinthians with the resurrection: how could the spiritual existence have a body (which is supposedly evil)?
- ii. Paul has been building up to this – that there are different kinds of bodies. Some are for the present time, perishable (due to sin), but not evil. The “being” of existence carries over from one form to another, but a body is a necessary part of “being”.

... As the next analogy (vv. 45–49) will make clear, they [adjectives “natural” and “spiritual”] do not describe the "stuff" or composition of the body; nor are they value words as in 2:14, describing the essential difference between those who belong to God and those who do not. 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. Thus for Paul, to be truly *pneumatikos* [spiritual] is to bear the likeness of Christ (v. 49) in a transformed body, fitted for the new age.¹⁷

- iii. Section 9 (v.45) is a *midrash* interpretation of Genesis 2:7¹⁸
 - 1. The first Adam was given life; the second Adam gives life
 - 2. This verse assumes both Adams have a body; i.e., the second Adam who is “spirit” is not in some kind of disembodied existence
 - 3. The point Paul makes is not Christology (i.e., the nature of Christ) but about the distinction between the natural (given to all humans at physical birth and spiritual (given at the resurrection) bodies
- iv. The argument is being made against the Corinthians who thought of themselves as already having entered the “spiritual” (or spirit-filled) state of being
 - 1. A resurrection (transformation) is necessary
 - 2. The resurrection includes the transformation of the body
 - 3. It hasn’t happened yet
 - 4. But it is in process – it is completed when Christ returns

Believers are said to share both kinds of existence, that of Adam through their humanity, that of Christ through their resurrection.¹⁹

5. Summary

- a. The body is not evil
- b. There is no existence apart from a body
- c. There is an appropriate body for each type of existence
- d. Resurrection is about the power of transformation – it involves the entire being: mind, spirit, body
- e. The Christian life is a process of transformation from the natural to the spiritual
- f. Transformation is completed when Christ returns
- g. Transformation is essential to those who belong to the kingdom of God

¹⁷ NICNT, 15:44.

¹⁸ NICNT, “b. Analogy of Adam and Christ (15:45–49)”

¹⁹ NICNT, 15:47.