

EASTER 2014  
1 Corinthians 15:35-49  
Written By  
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C.S. Lewis put death in biblical perspective with this pithy statement:

“There are better things ahead than any we leave behind” (*The New Encyclopedia Of Christian Quotations*: 254).

Just what those “better things” might be are wonderfully detailed by the Apostle Paul in First Corinthians chapter 15. And, of course, Paul’s teaching is intrinsically tied to the historical resurrection of Jesus Christ, a fact he validates in the first nineteen verses of this core theological passage.

From what we learn about the believers at (what I’d call) Corinth Community Church, they struggled with certain aspects of theology, like you and I do at times. According to Paul’s comment in verse 12 of this amazing and intriguing chapter, some of them bought into the false notion that Christ experienced a bodily resurrection but no one after Him would. Like a loving shepherd the good apostle confronted their erroneous thinking by showing them its untenable, illogical structure, coupled with the utter sovereign necessity of bodily resurrection (1 Cor. 15:13-34).

Beginning in verse 35, he then guided them on one of the most magnificent theological tours of all time ... in my humble estimation. I offer this conclusion because in the ensuing fifteen verses, he pulls back the curtain dividing our world and the next world, and gives believers of all time a tantalizing taste of what our resurrected bodies will be like.

Exciting, isn't it? And to think this revelatory information all started with a question Paul probably heard from the spiritual skeptics, the spiritually "enlightened" at CCC. Please. Read the question with an air of sarcasm, with your head tilted back a bit, and your nose slightly in the air:

“<sup>35</sup> But someone will say, ‘How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?’”

Let's focus our attention on the first question: “How are the dead raised?” Behind this query is the thinking the physical body has no intrinsic relationship to the spiritual body. The question also demonstrates a reticence to believe it's possible for the terrestrial to inherit the celestial since there exists a vast polarity and difference between the two. How, then, could the one ever become the other? *How* could a dead body, prone to disease, decay and dust, ever attain vibrant life in the next dimension?

From a pastoral perspective, it is most interesting how Paul dealt with this questioner, be he fictional (which I doubt knowing the propensity of Corinth) or non-fictional. You might want to sit up straight before you read his direct words:

Ἀφρον σὺ

This adjectival clause is translated correctly by the NIV and NAS translations with an exclamation point to show utter disdain:

<sup>36</sup>You fool!

So much for being nice, understanding, and non-confrontational. I highly doubt Paul would have fit in well with our overly open-minded, tolerate-all-positions culture. No, with folks peddling false theology in the church while questioning sound theology, especially where the doctrine of resurrection is concerned, Paul minced no words in order to bring clarity and to establish conviction.

In Greek, his statement is most emphatic by placing the adjective, fool, first in the sentence before the word “you.” It is purposefully and grammatically designed to grab your attention ... and it does. It is the only time in any of his writings he employed this exact grammatical combination, and I believe he did so because so much was at stake. If you first deny the resurrection of the human body, and then you are so spiritually checked out you don't understand how it is possible for a bodily resurrection to occur in a cosmos designed and controlled by the living God, then you are a fool ... in the biblical sense of the word. Think about this. To question the “how to” of the bodily resurrection puts you in the category of a fool who lives as if there is no God. Do you really want to go there? I don't, but many in our godless, humanistic culture do. We will pray for God to enlighten them.

Now, back to the question at hand: “How is it possible for the dead to be raised?”

To answer this question, Paul taps into the world of seeds. Why didn't he tap into the awesome, unlimited power of God up front? Why didn't he quote what God told Sarah after she laughed at Him when He said she would have a baby in her old age?

“Is anything too difficult for the LORD?” (Gen. 18:14).

Why didn't he draw from his wealth of knowledge about God's actions in the Old Testament and say ...

- “He who parted the Red Sea can certainly raise you.”
- “He who brought the walls of Jericho down with the sounds of trumpets and a shout can certainly raise you.”
- “He who delivered Daniel's three friends in the fiery furnace can certainly give life to your deceased body.”

Why, indeed? Paul didn't head down this road because that is not were the people at CCC were cognitively. He wanted to slowly lead them to his point, so he started with a logical and rudimentary analysis of seed germination, which was something they were all well aware of.<sup>1</sup>

“That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; ...”

This is *how* a body can be resurrected. Divinely built into the genetic structure of every seed is the power to become something altogether “different” at the moment of death when it is planted in the soil. As Paul adds in the next verse:

“<sup>37</sup> and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else.”

This is the mystery and marvel of germination. You plant a seed in the soil, it dies, and then it rises out of the soil based on what type of seed it was. As a person who loves gardening, this is one facet of the creation which has always captured my attention. While a child, my mother had us take a glass jar and put cotton in the bottom of it. After we added some water to the cotton, we dropped seemingly dead seeds into the jar. Watching them spring to life later is something I shall never forget. God specifically designed seed to do this according to Paul:

“<sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own.”

Ah, *now* we get to God. Seeds mysteriously become flourishing, beautiful plants, and it's all because a divine Creator causes this to happen. The point, then, is well-taken. Since God transforms seeds into new “life forms,” He most certainly can do the same with a dead body which is likewise planted in the ground. Wise people understand this truth. Fools do not.

From these verses, we not only have the answer to the first question, but also the beginning of the answer to the all-important second question:

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<sup>1</sup> Since Corinth was not far from Athens, we can safely assume the saints from this church had been exposed, from childhood, to the teachings of Aristotle, teachings which highlighted the importance of deductive reasoning in studying the strength or weakness of a given logical argument. From a Grecian perspective, then, Paul attempted to demonstrate how the earthly body could become the heavenly body by means of a logical argument from the terrestrial to the celestial. Of course, his argument was not airtight, from a purely structural standpoint, but it did serve to validate the logical nature of his theological conclusion(s). Translated, to the skeptic Paul says that the concept of the resurrection and attainment of a resurrected body is logical and plausible. From a Christian worldview, however, He knew it was, in fact, a hard reality; however, one must note how he sought to guide the thinking of people in a fashion they were familiar with from their culture.

“And with what kind of body do they come?”

The paraphrase *The Message* is helpful at this juncture:

“What does this ‘resurrection body’ look like?”

Really, this is the main idea of this portion of Scripture.

## What Will The Resurrected Body Be Like? (1 Corinthians 15:37-49)

Who hasn't gazed into the star-studded skies while hiking in the mountains and asked this question? Who hasn't stood next to the flag draped coffin of a loved one and pondered this thought? Who hasn't looked at the lifeless shell of a dead person and wondered what a resurrection body will be like? I have many times.

Paul doesn't let you down. By way of inspired revelation, he takes your hand and carefully leads you to a fuller understanding of what is going to happen on resurrection day. Three lines of evidence are all he needs to enlighten people of all time.

## The Answer From The Cosmos (1 Corinthians 15:37-41)

How did Solomon become so wise? He asked God for wisdom and God gave it to him (1 Kings 3:9). His wisdom was also enhanced by his close observation and serious study of the world around him.

“<sup>33</sup> He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that grows on the wall; he spoke also of animals and birds and creeping things and fish. <sup>34</sup> Men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom” (1 Kings 4).

Solomon learned the world he lived and breathed in had enough information to teach him much about spiritual life, about wise life. Paul merely followed in Solomon's steps by using three analogies from our world to teach us about the nature of the resurrected body, and quite obviously, his argument is *a fortiori*, or from the lesser to the greater. Paul, a trained rabbi, loved this method of argumentation the rabbis called *kal va-chomer* to transliterate it from the Hebrew.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Wikipedia*: The first rule of Hillel and of rabbi Ishmael is "kal va-chomer" (Hebrew: קל וחומר), called also "din" (conclusion). This is the argument "a minori ad majus" or "a majori ad minus." In the Baraita on the Thirty-two Rules this rule is divided into two (Nos. 5 and 6), since a distinction is made between a course of reasoning carried to its logical conclusion in the Holy Scriptures themselves ("kal wa-chomer meforash") and one merely suggested there ("kal va-chomer satum"). The completed argument is illustrated in ten examples given in Genesis Rabbah xcii. The full name of this rule should be "kal wa-Chomer, chomer we-kal" (simple and complex, complex and simple), since by it deductions are made from the simple to the complex or vice versa, according to the nature of the conclusion required. The major premise on which the argument is based is called "nadon," or, at a later period, "melammed" (that which teaches); the conclusion resulting from the argument is termed למה נלמד, or, later, "lamed" (that which learns). The process of deduction in the kal va-chomer is limited by the rule that the conclusion may contain nothing more than is found in the premise. This is the so-called "dayyo" law, which many teachers, however,

First, Paul tells us we must consider the seed. Let's go over these verses with the new perspective in mind:

<sup>37</sup> and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. <sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own."

I think one of the reasons I have a love of gardening is because plants teach me so much about life.

Take seeds, for instance. Tulip seeds don't look anything like the green-stemmed flower which bursts through the cold ground. Crocus seeds are, well, ugly, and they bear no resemblance to the vibrant flowers they produce. The bulb of an iris plant looks more like a rock than a potential flower. Admit it. There is nothing whatsoever in what bulbs look like to indicate just how glorious and stunning they will be when they germinate. Additionally, there is a direct organic relationship between what you plant and what you get. Plant a tulip seed and you get a tulip, not a sunflower. The seed and the flower are radically different looking in appearance; however, they are genetically and organically linked.

What's the point where our resurrection is concerned? What is sown into the ground, and what emerges on resurrection day are radically different, but continuously, organically linked. If that doesn't help you, then perhaps the words of Warren Wiersbe will:

"Resurrection is not reconstruction. Nowhere does the Bible teach that, at the resurrection, God will 'put together the pieces' and return to us our former bodies. There is continuity (it is our body), but there is not identity (it is not the same body)" (*Be Wise*: 156).

Robertson and Plummer, two renowned Greek scholars, grope in wonder as they describe this almost indescribable truth:

"The new living organism is not the old one reconstructed, although it has a necessary and close connexion with it; it is neither identical with the former, nor it is a new creation (John xii.24). Dissolution and continuity are not incompatible; how they are combined is a mystery beyond our ken, but the fact that they can be combined is evident, and death setting free a mysterious power of new life is part of the how"<sup>3</sup>

Amazing. Is your jaw on the floor? Are you excited?

Various forms of flesh are also instructive in our quest to understand the composition of the resurrected body.

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ignored. It is formulated thus: וְדָנָה תִּיְהִי לְיָדָה וּמֵאֲבֵל וַיֵּד ("The conclusion of an argument is satisfied when it is like the major premise").

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Driver & Alfred Plummer. *The International Critical Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911): 369.

“<sup>39</sup> All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish.”

From verse 39 through 40 there are no verbs. This is called ellipsis and it is a literary device employed to cause the reader (or listener) to dwell intently and thoughtfully upon the words in question.<sup>4</sup>

In Genesis 1, we have an *ascending* description of the creation of the different flesh types: fish, birds, animals, and then man (Gen. 1:20-27). Here we have, as Dr. David Garland points out, the “*descending* order of complexity: humans, animals, birds, and fish” (*First Corinthians*: 730). The flesh of a man is vastly different than that of a horse, a parrot, or a sturgeon. The conclusion, therefore, can’t be missed: Since such a variety of flesh exists here on earth, there can ... and will be ... a different kind of flesh for a resurrected human body. That is no problem for a God who *specializes* in variety. Take a look around you and you will see.

Will you have the flesh you have now when you are in heaven? Good question. The answer is unequivocally, “No.” You will have flesh, but it will be a flesh unlike anything a Spielberg could dream up or *Pixar* could create with special effects. We bow in light of the mysterious magnificence which is coming.

One more thing, says Paul. Don’t forget to consider the stars above your head:

“<sup>40</sup> There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. <sup>41</sup> 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.”

Astronomy is another passion of mine. Once more, I am captivated by the beauty, wonder, vastness, complexity, and machine-like order of the cosmos above my head. Lou Giglio and I share the same passion, only he wrote a book about it called *Indescribable*. After a Chris Tomlin concert about a year and half ago, as I spoke with Chris and Lou in a private room after the concert, Lou gave me a copy of his book. To read it is to learn about the presence of the Creator who created all of this cosmic beauty, divergence, and complexity.

Paul’s cosmic point here is well-taken: Just as stars differ in radiance, along with planets, our resurrected bodies will differ from what we possess presently. Antares is an orange-red star, the eye of what astronomers call the Scorpion constellation. Concerning its brilliance, Dr. Donald DeYoung observes:

“Antares has a diameter that is 700 times the size of the sun and shines with the brightness of 9,000 suns” (*Astronomy And The Bible*: 74).

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<sup>4</sup> E.W. Bullinger. *Figures of Speech Used In The Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968): 1. “The omission arises not from want of thought, or lack of care, or from accident, but from design, in order that we may not stop to think of, or lay stress in, the word omitted, but may dwell on the other words which are thus emphasized by the omission. For instance, in Matt. Xiv. 19, we read that the Lord Jesus ‘gave the loaves to His disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.’” This, by definition, highlights the fact that Jesus miraculously worked through the disciples in order to multiply the loaves.

Leaves you dumbfounded, doesn't it? How could any star be brighter than our sun? Easy in this cosmos. Betelgeuse is a massive star, some 1,200 times larger than our sun, and some 120,000,000 times brighter as well.

Once more, Paul's emphasis can't be missed: *Difference in radiance in astral systems clearly proves God can, and will, make our resurrected bodies amazingly different than our earthly bodies.*<sup>5</sup> I'm ready for different, aren't you? Better hair. Better eyes. Better skin. Better muscle tone. Better everything!

A second line of reasoning which tells us about the nature of the new body is this:

### The Answer From The Contrasts (1 Corinthians 15:42-45)

Here Paul shifts from an indirect discussion about the nature of the resurrection body to a direct discussion. With his first statement, he proves this by tying what he has just said to the resurrected body.

“<sup>42</sup> So also is the resurrection of the dead.”

Or, in other words, the resurrected body is fantastically different as the seed is from the plant, as the flesh of man is from the flesh of fish, and as the radiance of the sun is from the moon. Now he proceeds to tell us in what way it will be different, and this is the exciting stuff:

“It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; <sup>43</sup> it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ...”

A series of contrasts gives us a birds-eye view of the new body.

Your physical body is as perishable as groceries left out on the counter. You live long enough and everything goes: you need longer arms to hold books away from your eyes so you can see, hearing aids keep you from saying “huh?” all the time, age-spots start appearing all over your once pristine, tight skin, lines etch around your eyes as if a birds landed on your face with their feet and then left impressions, your forty-five inch chest is ultimately located somewhere around your waist, you gain weight just looking at food, you loose your flexibility so just getting into a car or tying your shoes is better than a gym workout, you find need softer foods because it's tough to chew on those gums, you pull a hamstring muscle just sitting down in your easy chair, your mind is about as sharp as a rusted ax, and your skin takes months to heal from the smallest cuts. Yes, as time goes by the body teaches you about its perishable nature.

Not so the spiritual body. It knows nothing of decay and corruption, ever. It never wears out, never fails to function, never loses its muscle tone, and it never gets so stiff it can't bend. It always is in top running performance and laughs at the need for an afternoon nap. It is perfect in every way imaginable.

Your physical body was born dishonorable, born with the propensity to live contrary to God and God's ways (Romans 3). Your new body will know nothing of the lust of sin, of the

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<sup>5</sup> Warren Wiersbe makes this interesting observation about the variance in astral radiance and how this may impact our resurrected bodies: “Not only are there earthly bodies, but there are also heavenly bodies; and they differ from one another. In fact, the heavenly bodies differ from each other in glory as far as the human eye is concerned. Paul is suggesting here that believer may differ from believer in glory, even though all Christians will have glorified bodies. Every cup in heaven will be filled, but some cups will be bigger than others, because of the faithfulness and sacrifice of those saints when they were on earth” (*Bible Exposition Commentary*, Vol. 1, p. 620-621).

immoral cravings of the physical body, nor of the godless indulgences of the flesh. For eternity it will never have a weak moral moment. On the contrary, if you are a Christ follower, you will only ever live to give praise and glory to God in your new, radically changed body. Imagine having a body which possessed this kind of control?

Your physical body is, by definition and nature, weak. Pick the strongest man in the world right now, and he is a weakling compared to the resurrected saint. Pick the strongest man in the world right now, and keep him off the weights for just a month and his strength will diminish quickly. Not so with the resurrected body. It is the epitome of Samsonlike strength. I can't wait. No longer will my wife hand me the pickle jar and say, "Honey, can you open this?" She'll just pop it open with no problem (Of course, this is assuming there are canned foods in heaven. ☺)

What will we need all that power for? Who knows. Paul doesn't tell us. We can only dream of having perfect bodies with amazing brute strength.

The final contrast is in verse 44:

“<sup>44</sup> it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual *body*.”

Right now we possess physical bodies, bodies suited and fitted for this terrestrial domain. We also have bodies constrained by the natural laws of this place. We may not always enjoy gravity, but we dare not test it by jumping out of plate without a parachute.

Our next body, our glorified and transformed body will be spiritual in nature, suited and fitted for the celestial domain, whatever that is. Who, I ask, can even begin to understand what that dimension will be like? And we know it is coming because the presence of the physical body teaches us this much.

Just exactly what will that body be like? To answer this one must study the resurrected body of our Lord.

Able to pass through matter (John 20:5-6)	Not immediately recognizable (John 20:15)
Able to communicate (John 20:15)	Tangible & Touchable (John 20:17)
Looks something like yourself (John 20:16)	Same voice (John 20:16)
Able to remember other people (John 20:19-23)	A powerful mind (John 20:24-28)
Able to cook (John 21:9)	Able to start a fire at will (John 21:9)
Able to catch fish at will (John 21:9)	Able to fly (Acts 1)
Able to eat food (Luke 24:42-43)	

True, some of these traits are probably strictly divine in nature, but I'm sure some of them are representative of what we will possess. Mind-numbing, as well as exciting, wouldn't you agree?

A final observation from Paul's inspired pen teaches us about the nature of the resurrection body. I call it ...

## The Answer From The Christ (1 Corinthians 15:46-49)

Listen to Paul and be enlightened and encouraged.

“<sup>45</sup> So also it is written, 'The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL.' The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. <sup>46</sup> However, the spiritual is not first, but the

natural; then the spiritual. <sup>47</sup> The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. <sup>48</sup> As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. <sup>49</sup> Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.”

Adam and Christ were both “born” sinless; however, the first Adam gave us willful disobedience to the command of God, sin, disease, destruction, and death. The last Adam, Jesus (as Paul articulates in Romans 5:12-21), gave us perfect obedience to all of the commands of God, and for those who trust in Him as their personal Savior, he gives us holiness (1 Corinthians 1:30), grace, forgiveness, and eternal life (Matthew 18:8; John 3:36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40; 10:28; 12:25; 17:2, 3; Romans 6:22-23).

The two men couldn't be more different.

The order of the two men shows something greater is coming on resurrection day. Adam came first. He was made from the earth, physical. Jesus came second. He was from heaven, spiritual, and eternal (John 6:31, 32, 38, 41, 42, 50, 51, 58). The order of the two men is a picture of our destiny. First we experience the physical body, which, in turn, *will be* (not *might be*) followed by the spiritual, resurrected body. This is God's guarantee to all of us. Death is not the end, but the beginning of new life, of a new body fashioned for the glory of the next world.

Do you believe it? Better yet, do you believe in the Savior who has the power to raise you to life eternal in His glorious, magnificent presence?

## Conclusion

I don't know about you, but I am just over-awed by this passage. It moves me. It puts a smile on my face. It pushes my thinking beyond its ability. It captivates me with mysterious wonder. Is it not simply moving to contemplate the nature of the bodies which await us?

Joni Eareckson Tada seeks to describe that body in her book *Heaven Your Real Home*:

“Trying to understand what our bodies will be like in heaven is much like expecting an acorn to understand his destiny of roots, bark, branches, and leaves. Or asking a caterpillar to appreciate flying. Or a peach pit to fathom being fragrant. Or a coconut to grasp what it means to sway in the ocean breeze. Our eternal bodies will be so grand, so glorious, that we can only catch a fleeting glimpse of Lima beans, kernels of wheat. Peach pits. Acorns and oak trees. Examples in nature are what the Bible invites us to use since, ‘What we will be has not yet been made known’ (1 John 3:2). One of the best ways to understand the resurrection is to take a field trip after the apostle Paul's lesson in nature: Go find an acorn on the ground, look up into the billowy skirts of the tree from which it fell, and then praise God that ‘so it will be with the resurrection of the dead’” (Chapter 2, *Who Are We In Heaven*).

I can hardly wait for the transformation into the likeness of Christ's resurrected body.

In light of all of this, I must pose a most important life question. Will you inherit the body fitted for blessing or judgment? Speaking about this one day to a large crowd assembled by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus gave this illumination:

“ For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:40).

There it is. There is the dividing mark between those who will be raised one day to glory and those who will be transformed and fitted for eternal judgment (Matthew 18:8; 25:41, 46; John 5:24). Your eternal destiny all centers around what you, as a sinner, do with the Savior who came to die for your sin and be raised as the Victor over sin and death on the third day. Will you place your faith in His redemptive work for you or will you not? Those who do place their faith in the Savior will experience the tremendous, breath-taking transformation described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. What a day that will be! An old hymn captures the wonder and emotion of the moment:

There is coming a day,  
When no heart aches shall come,  
No more clouds in the sky,  
No more tears to dim the eye,  
All is peace forever more,  
On that happy golden shore,  
What a day, glorious day that will be.

What a day that will be,  
When my Jesus I shall see,  
And I look upon His face,  
The One who saved me by His grace;  
When He takes me by the hand,  
And leads me through the Promised Land,  
What a day, glorious day that will be.

There'll be no sorrow there,  
No more burdens to bear,  
No more sickness, no pain,  
No more parting over there;  
And forever I will be,  
With the One who died for me,  
What a day, glorious day that will be.

What a day that will be,  
When my Jesus I shall see,  
And I look upon His face,  
The One who saved me by His grace;  
When He takes me by the hand,  
And leads me through the Promised Land,  
What a day, glorious day that will be.

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