

In our time in chapter 15, we have been following Paul’s argument for the resurrection of the dead at the end of the age. He has argued, first, that Christ’s resurrection secures a future resurrection (vv. 1–11); second, that resurrection is necessary for the ultimate defeat of death (vv. 12–28); and, third, that resurrection is a necessary impetus for Christian faith and practice (vv. 29–34).

In this next section, the apostle anticipates an objection: It is physically impossible for the dead to rise again, and for a mortal human body to survive for eternity. He argues, in vv. 35–49 that this is no obstacle to resurrection, for the resurrection body is a transformed body.

### The Resurrection Body is Intelligible (vv. 35–41)

Paul argues, first of all, that the doctrine of resurrection is perfectly intelligible. The first-century Greek worldview had no category for a resurrected body. It could comprehend an immortal soul, but not an immortal body. The Corinthians, it seemed, had imported this worldview into their thinking. To them, the body was little more than a container for the soul, and the best thing that could happen was for the soul to be freed from the body. Paul paints a very different picture; he places great emphasis on the body.

#### TO THINK ABOUT

If we embrace what Paul teaches in this text about the enduring nature of the human body, ought it to affect the way we treat our bodies? What implication does this teaching have for bodily exercise and nutrition? What about the way we treat the body at death? Does this say anything about burial versus cremation—or, for that matter, organ donation or donating your body for research?

As observed, the Corinthians, living with a first-century Greek worldview, could not comprehend the resurrection of the body, Paul gives two illustrations to show that a resurrection body is perfectly intelligible.

First, a resurrection body is compatible with biological transformation (vv. 35–38). While he is not seeking to make a botanically or scientifically technical argument here, Paul points to the reality that a seed, if it will become a plant, must first “die.” That is, it must decompose in seed form to be transformed into a plant. In the same way, the mortal body must decompose before it will be transformed into an immortal body.

Second, a resurrection body is compatible with biological variety (vv. 39–41). God has created all sorts of creatures that have bodies suited to their environment. Birds have bodies suited for flight. Fish have bodies suited for swimming. Humans have bodies, at present, suited for life and death in the world in which we live. Since God designed these bodies to be suited for their environment, it is perfectly logical to affirm that God can create a body suited for an eternal, immortal existence.

### The Resurrection Body is Incomprehensible (vv. 42–46)

Even though the concept of a resurrected body is perfectly intelligible, it is at the same time incomprehensible. It is, on the one hand, somewhat natural, yet at the same time entirely supernatural. The resurrection body will be different in both quality and kind.

First, the resurrection body is different in quality (vv. 42–43): It will be transformed from “perishable” to “imperishable,” from “dishonour” to “glory,” and from “weakness” to “power.” The idea of transformation is understandable enough, but we cannot comprehend something going from perishable to imperishable, from mortal to immortal.

#### TO THINK ABOUT

When we see the ravaging effects of sin on a mortal body, we often express sentiments to the effect that the person should be released from the body to be put out of their suffering. While that is understandable to a degree, how does this text help you to embrace a more thorough Christian worldview? In the Christian worldview, is ultimate freedom from suffering about *deliverance* from the body, or about *transformation* of the body?

Second, the resurrected body is different in kind (vv. 44–46). It will be transformed from “natural” to “spiritual.” It is important to note that “spiritual” is not used here as a contrast to *physical*, as if the eternal state is a disembodied one, but in contrast to “natural.” “Supernatural” might be a good synonym for “spiritual.”

The physicality of the resurrection body is seen in v. 45 when it is compared to Adam, who became “a living being” (or, “a living soul”). In the Genesis account (2:7), God “formed the man of the dust of the ground.” Moses identifies the lifeless body as “the man,” and “God breathed into his nostril’s and the man became a living creature.” He did not become a “man” with the breath of life, but “the man” became “a living creature” with the breath of life. This is a technical, but important, point, because it highlights that, as Adam was a *physical* being, so our resurrection bodies will be *physical* bodies. Nevertheless, there will be a radical transformation from a *natural* to a *supernatural* body.

According to this text, therefore, the physical body will ultimately be an enduring body. It is, therefore, not to be escaped from, but to be embraced—though we long for its full transformation.

#### TO THINK ABOUT

The Bible teaches that the body will be transformed—as the earth will be transformed. Neither the body (of a Christian) nor the earth are destined for ultimate destruction, but for ultimate transformation and restoration. How does this truth inform the way that we care for God’s creation—both our bodies and the earth on which God has placed us?

### The Resurrection Body is Indescribable (vv. 47–49)

Paul draws this part of his argument to a close by pointing to the indescribable glory and beauty of the resurrected body: We will be like Christ! As John writes elsewhere, “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:3). He will talk about the process by which this change will occur in vv. 50–58, but for now he points simply to the reality of this change.

These verses teach the reality of what theologians call “federal headship”—that is, that Adam represented humanity when he sinned, plunging all humans into sin, and that Christ represented his chosen ones when he died and rose again, purchasing eternal salvation for them. Our transformation is secured by Christ’s person and work.

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*The imperishable became perishable that the perishable might become imperishable. Jesus, the glorious one, experienced dishonor so that the dishonorable might experience glory. Jesus, the powerful one, became weak so that the weak might become powerful. Jesus who deserved life experienced death so that those who deserved death might experience new life. Jesus, “the man of heaven” (v. 49), made himself a Son of Man—a man of the earth—so that the sons of Adam, men of the earth, might become men of Heaven. In this Jesus the natural and the supernatural come together.*

(Stephen T. Um)

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The truth of the resurrection affords us the faith that we need to persevere through difficulty for God’s glory. Hebrews 11:35 speaks of faithful saints “who were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life” (literally, “a better resurrection”). Their hope was in the resurrection, and that enabled them to live lives of intense faith.

#### TO THINK ABOUT

How much detail does the Bible give us about the glorified body? What can you confidently assert about your resurrection body? What must you admit ignorance about? In the entire discussion, what would you say is the single most important thing to affirm about the Christian’s resurrection body?