

# OUR RESURRECTION BODY: AN EXEGESIS OF 1 CORINTHIANS 15:42-49

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## **Introduction**

What type of body will I have at the resurrection? This is a legitimate question, asked by many believers. The basis of the question may be eschatological (what is going to take place at the end of life?), theological (what is the relationship between the earthly body and the spiritual body?), or it may be ontological (will I be an old body, young body; what kind of body?). 1 Cor 15:42-49 offers some insights into the nature of the resurrection body, but, by no means, does Paul offer a definitive statement on the matter. Reading the text, to try and establish answers to any or all of the questions above, may be seeking answers to a question that Paul, himself, was not directly addressing.

It would appear to be a more valid approach to argue that Paul was writing this theological corrective in response to a problem that had emerged in the life of the Corinthian church. Many scholars would agree that Paul wrote to a church, which considered the body eschatologically insignificant, and which were operating with an eschatological worldview, which was overrealised.<sup>1</sup> Paul argues that this is an error, and argues for some sort of continuity between the body, which the Christian lives in now, and the resurrection body. With this framework in mind, we are able to make a lot more sense of

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1987, p. 12.

the text of 1 Cor 15:42-49 than we would if we read it with a view to answer the question “What type of body?”

## **Background Issues**

### **Authorship**

Strong external and internal evidence argues for Pauline authorship. The epistle is attested to by Clement of Rome, and is also frequently cited by Ignatius and Polycarp.<sup>2</sup> Paucity of references to the authorship in later literature indicates general acceptance of its source. Internal evidence for Pauline authorship is strong. The style, language, and theology correlate with other Pauline works. Although there continues to be debate about the precise location of this epistle within the process of interaction between Paul and the church in Corinth, there is, nonetheless, strong congruence between this epistle and the wider Corinthian correspondence, which argues for its authenticity. Furthermore, the fact that the epistle was preserved, despite its strong polemical nature, suggests the recipients were in no doubt as to its authenticity.

### **Unity**

Many scholars doubt the extant form of the epistle is the original.<sup>3</sup> Attempts to defend theories of interpolation can only be sustained if it can be demonstrated different situations lie behind Paul’s responses, and many conservative scholars argue such a hypothesis cannot be maintained.<sup>4</sup> Fee argues the divisionists miss the basic form of argumentation in this epistle, and, along with Morris, concludes there

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians is the first New Testament document to be cited with the name of the author: 1 Clement 47:1-3, Clement of Rome, *The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, Kirsopp Lake, tran., Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1912, pp. 89-90. Dating for 1 Clement varies, however, scholarly consensus rests on a date of approximately 95 AD.

<sup>3</sup> W. G. Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, London UK: SCM Press, 1975, pp. 276ff., surveys the reconstructions proposed by Schmithals, Jewett, Dinkler, Hering, and others.

<sup>4</sup> Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, J. W. Leitch, tran., Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1975, p. 4. Also Kenneth Bailey, “The Structure of 1 Corinthians”, in *Novum Testamentum* 25 (1983), p. 153.

is no doubt this is an authentic letter of the apostle Paul, free from any substantial interpolation.<sup>5</sup> The exegesis of 1 Cor 15:42-49 proceeds upon this assumption.

## **Recipients**

The recipients lived in the city of Corinth, which lay on the narrow isthmus of land between two harbours, Lecheion and Cenchreae. Corinth was a strategic centre for commerce, the source of its wealth, in the trade, which passed through the city. Corinth was multicultural, and religiously pluralistic. The community, Paul addressed, was also socio-economically diverse.<sup>6</sup>

Although attempts have been made to argue for a predominantly Jewish background for the recipients,<sup>7</sup> many scholars reject this thesis.<sup>8</sup> Internal evidence alone makes an argument for predominantly Jewish recipients hard to sustain.<sup>9</sup>

## **Date**

This letter was written some time after Paul's initial visit to the city, and consensus rests on a date between AD 55-58. The accuracy of this date relies heavily on the integrity of the date of Acts 18:1ff.

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<sup>5</sup> Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 16; Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1958, p. 28.

<sup>6</sup> The names indicate that there were Jews, Italians, and Greeks among the congregation. 1 Cor 12:13 indicates the diversity of the congregation, while 1 Cor 1:26 indicates not many were from the wealthy class. However, Moffatt argues many of the issues, addressed by Paul, applied specifically to the freeborn citizens of social position, James Moffatt, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, London UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938, p. xx.

<sup>7</sup> J. M. Ford, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians or the First Epistle to the Hebrews?", in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 28 (1966), pp. 402-416. R. Mcl. Wilson, "How Gnostic Were the Corinthians?", in *New Testament Studies* 19 (1972), p. 65, argues the evidence of Acts supports a fairly substantial Jewish element in Corinth

<sup>8</sup> For example: Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 4, n. 12. Fee also rejects the work of Hurley, who attempted to demonstrate a Jewish readership could be sustained by examination of various passages.

<sup>9</sup> Passages such as 1 Cor 6:1-20; 8:1-10:22; 12:2 are strong evidence for Gentile recipients.

## **Provenance**

This letter has traditionally been understood as a response by Paul to opposition from various groups mentioned in 1 Cor 1:12. Fee argues 1 Corinthians is an *ad hoc* response to issues, which were brought to Paul's attention through a letter he received, as well as to news he received independently of the letter.<sup>10</sup>

Paul's first concern was to reply to questions raised in a letter he received, apparently queries, raised by a former letter he sent, which dealt with issues, such as marriage and idolatrous practices.<sup>11</sup> News, which accompanied the letter, possibly reported by the couriers (1 Cor 16:17), caused Paul to write quite forcibly to the Corinthians.

The benign description of the church asking for Paul's opinion or guidance on certain issues (as has traditionally been proposed), inadequately explains the polemical nature of Paul's reply, and so, Fee proposes an alternative, which contends the divisions at Corinth were primarily between the apostle and the church. Fee, along with Ellis and Witherington, asserts there were no outside agitators present within the church, rather the opposition was from within.<sup>12</sup> The key issue, which occasioned this letter, Fee argues, is that Paul's apostolic authority is being called into question by the church, which is concurrently Hellenising the gospel.<sup>13</sup>

In chapter 15, Paul responds to confusion being exhibited over the nature of the resurrection, confusion which apparently has its foundation in the same Hellenisation, which has contributed to the other aberrations. Hellenistic dualism, combined with the belief by

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<sup>10</sup> Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> A proposed reconstruction of the correspondence by J. C. Hurd can be found in C. K. Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, London UK: Adam & Charles Black, 1968, pp. 6-7; also Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>12</sup> Earle E. Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1993, p. 103. Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995, p. 74.

<sup>13</sup> Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 10.

the Corinthians that they were already spiritual (realised eschatology), appears to be at the base of the opposition.

### Literary Context

This chapter falls into a section, which begins at 1 Cor 7:1, being Paul's responses to the correspondence he has received from Corinth. Chapter 15 deals with the question of the resurrection, verses 35-49 with the nature of the resurrection. The abrupt change of subject, and the lack of the usual introductory formula, *περὶ δὲ ὧν ἐγράψατε* (concerning the matters you wrote about), has caused scholars to hypothesise this section is either a response to a report, or is an interpolation. 1 Cor 15:12 is the only internal clue as to the origin of the response.<sup>14</sup>

The section, beginning at verse 35, is Paul's response to questions of how the dead are raised. He responds with what appears to be a tautology, but is actually an answer to two questions, verses 42-49 dealing with the new corporeality.

### Exegesis

#### Verse 42

#### *So also with the resurrection of the dead*

In this verse, Paul applies the two analogies, which began at verse 36, as part of his answer to the assertion by the Corinthians that there was no resurrection. There are a number of views, which have sought to explain why the Corinthians held such a position, including the

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<sup>14</sup> Evidence, which supports the argument for a response to a report, rests on the language used by Paul; *how can some among you say and but someone will say*. Theories of interpolation have to deal with the chapter in the wider context of the letter, although Schmithals argues this chapter stands alone in the first letter Paul sent to Corinth with Stephanos, Walter Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth*, New York NY: Abingdon Press, 1971, p. 95. Others see this chapter as being part of wider context; cf. Hering in Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 12, and Weiss in Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, p. 3. It is best to proceed assuming this chapter is an integral part of the epistle.

influence of Sadducean theology,<sup>15</sup> Greek philosophy, Gnosticism,<sup>16</sup> over-realised eschatology,<sup>17</sup> or realised immortality.<sup>18</sup>

To counter the denial of the resurrection of material bodies, as is suggested by the predominance of the use of **σῶμα** (body) throughout verses 35-58,<sup>19</sup> Paul develops two analogies, based on seeds (vv. 37-38) and bodies (39-41). He begins this verse with the phrase **οὕτως καὶ** (so also)<sup>20</sup> to apply the analogies to the resurrection. The verbs, in the antithetical parallelisms, which follow, are all in the present, and permit the inclusion of “is” as the verb in the opening phrase.

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<sup>15</sup> No belief in a resurrection. Gunter Stemberger, *Jewish Contemporaries of Jesus: Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes*, Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1995, p. 70ff.

<sup>16</sup> Walter Schmithals has been a key proponent of this theory, and Paul’s use of **σοφία** (*sophia* = wisdom) has fuelled this theory, Schmithals, *Gnosticism*, p. 113, cf. Ulrich Wilckens, “**σοφία**”, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1971, vol 7, p. 519. More recently, scholars have argued fully-developed gnosticism could not be the source of opposition to Paul. See R. Mcl. Wilson, “How Gnostic Were the Corinthians?”, in *New Testament Studies* 19 (1972/1973), pp. 65-74. J. Munck, “The New Testament and Gnosticism”, in *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation*, New York NY: Harper & Row, 1962, pp. 234-236, and Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Represented in 2 Tim 2:17-18.

<sup>18</sup> The whole question of opposition is summarised by Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 715, n. 6, A. J. M. Wedderburn, “The Problem of the Denial of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians XV”, in *Novum Testamentum* 23 (1981), pp. 238-239, and C. K. Barrett, “Immortality and Resurrection”, in *Resurrection and Immortality: Aspects of Twentieth-century Belief*, Charles Duthie, ed., London UK: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1979, p. 78. Fee contends a better way to understand the opposition is to see it as part of the underlying division between the apostle and the church, in this case over what it means to be spiritual.

<sup>19</sup> Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 776; also Ronald J. Sider, “The Pauline Conception of the Resurrection Body in 1 Corinthians 15:35-54”, in *New Testament Studies* 21 (1974/1975), p. 430, who argues the issue, addressed by Paul in 1 Cor 39-41, is the substance of things, not just their form, contrary to Bultmann, who argues Paul distinguishes between **σῶμα** (substance) and **εἶδος** (form), Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, London UK: SCM Press, 1952, vol 1, p. 192.

<sup>20</sup> A literary device, Paul uses frequently, as he applies metaphors, cf. 1 Cor 2:11; 12:12; 14:9; Gal 3:4; and Rom 6:11.

... *it is sown in corruption*

Paul continues to use the metaphor of the seed, stating, *σπείρεται* (it is sown), but does not provide a subject for the verb. While the body appears to be the subject, particularly in light of *σῶμα ψυχικόν* (a natural body) in verse 44, this is not the only interpretation.<sup>21</sup>

There is a danger, in carrying the metaphor of the seed too far in this verse, believing Paul is only referring to the body in the grave, awaiting the resurrection.<sup>22</sup> It is more appropriate to understand this as a comparison between the body now possessed, “corruptible, tending to decay, subject to disease and death, and, ultimately, entire dissolution”,<sup>23</sup> and the future body, which will be incorruptible. It is probable the Corinthians held a contemptuous view of the physical body, a thoroughly-Greek belief, reflected in 1 Cor 6:14-15.

*φθορᾶ* (corruption) and *ἀφθαρσία* (incorruption) are opposites, the former used to describe destruction, or deterioration, in the natural world, a process which may begin before death.<sup>24</sup> Paul uses a Greek word, which has the meaning of incorruptibility, immortality, or, as a quality of future life. 2 Tim 1:10, 2 Clement 14:5, and Eph 6:24 demonstrate the word may be used to describe both believers in the present, as well as for Jesus, who already reigns.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Barrett sees the verb *σπείρεται* as an impersonal passive, which would require the translation to read *the sowing takes place in corruption*, Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 372, also Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 784, n. 37.

<sup>22</sup> As Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd edn, Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979p. 761, and R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians*, Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Publishing, 1961, p. 711.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Hodge, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, London UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958, p. 347.

<sup>24</sup> Used in this way, in Col 2:22, as also in other ancient literature. See Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 858.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

*Excursus on ἀφθαρσία*

In secular Greek, ἀφθαρσία (resurrection) means to stand up,<sup>26</sup> raise, awaken, or rouse.<sup>27</sup> Although the Greek philosophical schools had a well-developed idea of the transmigration of souls into some other body, there was a belief that resurrection was either impossible, or an isolated miracle.<sup>28</sup>

The Old Testament concept of death is of death as a final state, notwithstanding the isolated accounts of individuals coming back to life. Dan 12:2 is the only explicit Old Testament reference to resurrection. Some intertestamental literature speaks of a resurrection including 2 Macc 14:46,<sup>29</sup> the Apocalypse of Baruch,<sup>30</sup> and 2 Esdras 7:32-36.<sup>31</sup>

1 Corinthians is perhaps the earliest of the New Testament literature to speak of the resurrection. Resurrection is spoken of as ἀνάστασις τῶν νεκρῶν or ἐξανάστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν (resurrection of the dead or resurrection from the dead.)<sup>32</sup> The New Testament concept of resurrection is not merely of corpses, either σῶμα (body), or σὰρξ (flesh), but the resurrection of the whole person, in a process Harris describes as accelerated Christification.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Josephus uses this term to describe the raising of a statue, Josephus, *Antiquities*, book 18, p. 301, in Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities Books XVIII- XXIX*, H. St J. Thackeray, tran., Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1965, p. 174.

<sup>27</sup> Colin Brown, "Resurrection", in *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Exeter UK: Paternoster Press, 1978, vol 3, p. 259.

<sup>28</sup> Albrecht Oepke, ἀνίστημι, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, G. Kittel, ed., Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1968, vol 1, p. 361.

<sup>29</sup> Also 2 Macc 7:9, 11, 14, 22ff., 29; 12:43.

<sup>30</sup> *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, James Charlesworth, ed., New York NY: Doubleday, 1983, p. 638.

<sup>31</sup> One piece of Jewish intertestamental literature, which speaks of a dying Messiah.

<sup>32</sup> The latter only being used in Phil 3:11. It is attested to by Polybuis (2nd century BC) and Hippocrates (4th-5th century BC), Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 272.

<sup>33</sup> Murray Harris, "Resurrection and Immortality: Eight Theses", in *Themelios* 1 (1975/1976), p. 51.

Harris argues the Pauline resurrection is a resurrection reserved for the Christian, who, through the resurrection, receives immortality.<sup>34</sup> The biblical doctrine of immortality contrasts with the Platonic, at a number of points. In the New Testament, immortality is not inherently possessed by the soul, only gained through resurrection transformation. There is a somatic connection between what exists now and will exist in the future, a strong theme in the passage at hand. “The only kind of resurrection, of which we believe St Paul could speak, was a bodily resurrection.”<sup>35</sup>

Paul also speaks of the resurrection of Christ, as the first fruits, or guarantee, of the future resurrection of believers.<sup>36</sup> This is significant in the context of 1 Corinthians, for the Corinthians appear to be objecting to the latter, not the former. Aquinas carried this imagery even further, declaring the resurrection of Christ causes the resurrection of believers.<sup>37</sup>

### Verse 43

#### *It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory*

The word δόξη (glory) has no direct negative, and Paul chooses to use ἄτιμία, a word which means shame, disgrace, or dishonour.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Jeremiah disagrees, asserting there is a distinction, drawn by Paul, between the dead unbeliever, where Paul omits the article before νεκρῶν (death) (1 Cor 15:12, 13, 15, 16, 20, 21, 29b, 32) and the dead believer, where Paul includes the Greek article (1 Cor 15:29a, 42, et al), Joachim Jeremias, “Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God”, in *New Testament Studies* 2 (1955/1956), p. 155/156. Jeremias further distinguishes between the resurrection of a dead believer and a living believer, an argument not supported by many scholars, L. J. Kreitzer, “Resurrection”, in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, R. P. Martin, and G. F. Hawthorne, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1993, pp. 811/812.

<sup>35</sup> Francis Foulkes, “Some Aspects of St Paul’s Treatment of the Resurrection of Christ in 1 Corinthians XV”, in *Australian Biblical Review* 16 (1968), p. 30.

<sup>36</sup> See Robert Murray, “New Wine in Old Wineskins: XII Firstfruits”, in *Expository Times* 86 (1975), pp. 164-168, for a discussion on Paul’s use of this Old Testament imagery.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, Westminster MD: Christian Classics, 1981, vol 4, p. 2319.

<sup>38</sup> Used also in 2 Cor 6:8, and by Josephus, as describing prohibitions on homosexual relations between animals, lest humans be tempted to engage in similar behaviour,

The meaning of δόξη (glory) is diverse, and can refer to literal brightness, splendour, or radiance.

R. J. Sider sees a link between the expression Paul uses here, (humiliation), and a similar one used in Phil 3:21, where Paul says our body of humiliation will be transfigured into the body of Christ's glory, by the power, which enables him to make all things subject to himself. Sider argues for a moral or ethical contrast between the words Paul uses (ἀτιμία and δόξη), for he believes it is possible Paul intended a similar contrast in Phil 3:21, where he speaks of Christ changing τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν (the body of our humiliation) to τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ (the body of his glory). If we allow a parallel between the δόξη of 1 Cor 15:43 and Phil 3:21, where there are ethical implications, we may assert the new body will be free from sin.<sup>39</sup>

Once again, it is clear Paul is taking the Corinthians to task for their attitude toward the physical body, believing the present condition had no bearing upon the manner in which the body was raised. The resurrection body is a glorious body, far surpassing the present body, which the Corinthians were treating with contempt, but there is a link between the two.

### ***It is sown in weakness, it is raised in strength***

Paul would ingratiate himself with the Corinthians, if he only spoke of the physical body being sown in weakness. While the Greeks were well known for cultivating bodily prowess, they would have been aware of its limitations, even at its peak, let alone the absolute powerlessness there is in a corpse.

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Josephus, *Antiquities IV*, p. 229, in Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities Book I-IV*, H. St J. Thackeray, tran., Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1930, p. 586.

<sup>39</sup> Sider argues the transformation of the σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως implies a reference to sin, for, in Phil 2:6, Jesus humbled Himself, dying an obedient death, which, for Paul, meant death for sin. The change in Phil 3:21, as well as the contrast in 1 Cor 15:43, therefore, can have ethical, or inner religious, implications. Sider can only rely on the context for the vocabulary, and does not make this connection. See Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 805; R. J. Sider, "The Pauline Conception", p. 433.

Fee argues the *δυνάμει* (power) is descriptive of the process of the body being raised, rather than the heavenly state. He cites no evidence to support this, but is probably relying on the eschatological use in Mark 9:1, which is descriptive of how the kingdom of God will be inaugurated. This tenet does not easily fit into the pattern established by Paul in these parallelisms, which describe the prior, and fulfilled, existence (corruption/incorruption, dishonour/glory, natural/spiritual). Nor does it account for the possibility that this parallel has an ethical undergirding,<sup>40</sup> which would see the contrast of 43b as ethical superiority, that is, the power of the new body to be free from sin.

#### Verse 44

##### *It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body*

Paul emphatically answers the question about the nature of the resurrection body, originally alluded to in verse 35. As this is the climax of Paul's argument, he abandons the impersonal form of expression for the more personal: *σῶμα ψυχικόν* (a natural body) is sown, a *σῶμα πνευματικόν* (spiritual body) is raised.

The word *σῶμα* (body) originated as a description for a dead body in the period of the 5th century BC, and, through the influence of Greek philosophy, a body-soul dichotomy developed, which is reflected in Sir 23:16ff; 47:19, and through the books of Maccabees.<sup>41</sup>

“In Paul, *σῶμα* has a specialised meaning, in the sense of person.”<sup>42</sup> Jewish anthropology, undoubtedly an influence on Paul, cannot imagine existence without a body, and so, for Paul, *soma* is an essential component of human existence, before and after the resurrection. In this verse, Paul sets up an antitheses between *σῶμα ψυχικόν* and *σῶμα πνευματικόν*, but there is a danger in simply

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 433.

<sup>41</sup> 4 Macc 14:5; 17:2.

<sup>42</sup> J. A. Motyer, “Body”, in *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Colin Brown, ed., Exeter UK: Paternoster Press, 1978, vol 1, p. 234.

understanding **σῶμα** as a kind, or form, which could be stamped on different materials.<sup>43</sup>

The English translations of **ψυχικόν** (variously: animal, sensual, natural, et al) do not adequately convey the meaning of this word.<sup>44</sup> The **ψυχή** embraces the whole of natural life, and is translated as souls, in reference to individuals, a reflection of Gen 2:7, where the **ψυχή** is a life force, breathed into animate man. Paul picks up the meaning from Gen 2:7 in his application. His concern is to reflect both the continuity and difference between the **ψυχικόν** (natural) and the **πνευματικόν** (spiritual), but, furthermore, as he continues his emphasis is on the fact that the resurrection is wholly an act of God. As the opponents believed they were already in possession of eternal life, they felt no need to refer to God's creative act, for the coming glory was already secure.<sup>45</sup> Paul, therefore, argues, if the body is inseparable from the essential substance of man, the future resurrection is guaranteed as an act of God.<sup>46</sup>

Some have surmised the **σῶμα πνευματικόν** (spiritual body) is a body consisting of **πνεῦμα** (spirit),<sup>47</sup> however, this does not accord well with Paul's aim, as he seeks to repudiate Greek thinking in terms of substance.<sup>48</sup> It seems better to understand the **σῶμα πνευματικόν** to be a new body, animated by the Spirit of God,<sup>49</sup> a body appropriate to the new life in the Spirit.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, it is a body, which only

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<sup>43</sup> Bultmann argues Paul has allowed himself to be misled into arguing along similar lines to his opponents, the use of **σῶμα** as "shape" being unPauline, Bultmann, *Theology*, vol 1, p. 192.

<sup>44</sup> Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 372; Bultmann, *Theology*, vol 1, p. 201.

<sup>45</sup> Eduard Schweizer, "**σῶμα**", in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol 7, p. 1062.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1062.

<sup>47</sup> So, for Leitzmann, in Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, p. 283, n. 27; Hodge, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 348. Against this, Schweizer, "**πνεῦμα πνευματικός**", in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol 6, p. 420.

<sup>48</sup> Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*, Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1990, p. 263.

<sup>49</sup> Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 372.

<sup>50</sup> Nigel Watson, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, London UK: Epworth Press, 1992, p. 176.

comes through the resurrection, which completely alters the somatic condition. Schweizer argues, “There is no thought [in Paul] of a pneumatic body, concealed under the earthly body”,<sup>51</sup> a theme, which is picked up by Paul in verse 46.

***If there is a natural body, there is a spiritual body***

This is the crux of Paul’s argument in this verse. It is important to retain *if* at the beginning of this sentence, for this maintains the force of the argument. Likewise the inclusion of *is* is also significant, because what Paul asserts is not mere speculation.

**Verse 45**

***So it is written: “The first Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life-giving Spirit***

Paul’s assertion in verse 44, that the existence of the natural body presupposes the spiritual body, is not entirely self-evident, and Paul attempts to vindicate this on two bases.

1. By reference to scripture;
2. On the evidence of Christ’s resurrection.

In this verse, Paul returns to an analogy, drawn earlier in the chapter, describing Christ and Adam (15:21-22), and he uses Gen 2:7 as a scriptural foundation for his argument. His first concern is to demonstrate his assertions about how the *σῶμα ψυχικόν* (natural body) and the *σῶμα πνευματικόν* (spiritual body) are in accordance with the scriptures. He is also concerned to demonstrate the archetypal nature of the two Adams, in relation to how the two kinds of bodies are sown and raised.<sup>52</sup>

The origin of Paul’s designation of Christ, as the second Adam, is uncertain. Hodge argues this designation for the Messiah was not

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<sup>51</sup> Schweizer, “πνεῦμα πνευματικός”, vol 6, p. 420.

<sup>52</sup> Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 789.

uncommon among the Jews, though there is no evidence found for this, anywhere in the scriptures.<sup>53</sup>

The first half of the verse is a quote by Paul from Gen 2:7, to which he adds the words **πρῶτος** (the first) and **Ἀδὰμ** (Adam). His additions are described by Fee as a type of *midrash peshet*, a quote, which is, at once, a citation and an interpretation.<sup>54</sup> Others prefer to describe the additions as a means, by which Paul makes the text more explicit, without changing the meaning.<sup>55</sup> Ultimately, Paul includes the additions, because they lead to the second line, where his real concern lies.

Paul chooses vocabulary, which reflects the previous verse, as he describes the first man Adam. His concern is to emphasise that, from Adam forward, every human being has **σῶμα ψυχικόν** (a natural body), which has been created by God. Consequently, **πρῶτος** (the first) gives Adam a typological interpretation.<sup>56</sup> Paul emphasises this, so he may contrast Christ as the second Adam, the progenitor of a spiritual race, who must, by necessity, come after the first Adam.<sup>57</sup>

In the second half of this verse, Paul changes the language he uses: **εἰς πνεῦμα ζωοποιῶν** (life-giving spirit) instead of the anticipated **σῶμα πνευματικόν** (spiritual body). The language, Paul uses in verse 45b, sounds as though he is continuing to quote from scripture, although no extant source can be found. Various alternatives have been proposed to solve the difficulty of sourcing this change. Suggestions include that Paul is referring to a lost document, an

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<sup>53</sup> Hodge, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 349-350. Moffatt, *First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 263, emphatically denies this contention. L. J. Kreitzer, "Adam and Christ", in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, R. P. Martin, and G. F. Hawthorne, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1993, p. 10, says, despite speculation about Adam in 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch and the Qumran literature, Paul seems to be the first to describe Christ as the last or second Adam.

<sup>54</sup> Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 788.

<sup>55</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of I and II Corinthians*, p. 717. Conzelmann argues Paul must have been working within some type of traditional exegetical framework, Conzelmann, *I Corinthians*, p. 284.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284.

<sup>57</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of I and II Corinthians*, p. 720.

imaginary document, a collection of messianically-interpreted Old Testament passages,<sup>58</sup> that Paul is making assumptions, based on the evidence of there being more than one type of *σῶμα*,<sup>59</sup> or that Paul is making his own Haggadic interpretation of these verses.<sup>60</sup>

A study of the context of this verse, and the Adam-Christ typology Paul has already established in this gospel (15:21-22), provides a solution to the dilemma, which is posed, by assuming Paul is trying to prove the double assertion made in verse 44.

Verse 45a states what would be plainly obvious to the Corinthians. Verse 45b should best be understood as Paul speaking independently of the Genesis citation, thereby identifying Jesus Christ as ὁ ἔσχατος Ἄδὰμ εἰς πνεῦμα ζωοποιοῦν (the last Adam, a life-giving Spirit), on the basis of what has gone before in this chapter, particularly verse 21-28. Paul cannot allow direct parallelism, because the Christian's future existence will never be the same as Christ. While Christians will be recreated in the likeness of the second Adam, there will be one decisive difference; Christ is life-giving. Whether this theological conclusion came from Paul's own reflection, or as a result of his exegesis of the Genesis citation, is inconsequential. What is significant, is the upholding of the tenet that the one who will breathe the life-giving πνεῦμα (spirit) is none other than the risen Christ, a theme found in the language of the previous Adam-Christ passage in verse 21-22.

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 717-720.

<sup>59</sup> C. K. Barrett, *From First Adam to Last: a Study in Pauline Theology*, London UK: Adam & Charles Black, 1962, p. 74.

<sup>60</sup> Moffatt, *First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 262. There are problems with this view, particularly in that Rabbinical speculation, centred on this verse, only focused on the first half of the verse, while Paul focused on the second half, Robin Scroggs, *The Last Adam*, Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1966, p. 87.

## Verse 46

### ***But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual***

Verse 47 appears to more naturally follow on from verse 45, which necessitates exploration of why Paul included verse 46. The beginning ἀλλ' οὐ (but not) has led some to believe Paul found it necessary to assert this order of things over against the Corinthians. One suggestion is that the Corinthians were influenced by Philonic theology, which distinguished between two men at creation, the heavenly man and the earthly man. In Philo, the heavenly man was first, the earthly man, a copy of him, was second.<sup>61</sup> The argument suggests Paul was familiar with this Philonic concept, and sought to deny it was a correct description of the two kinds of body they represented.<sup>62</sup> Scroggs rejects this view, arguing a correct exegesis of Philo reveals he did not set out to contrast the heavenly man with the earthly man, nor is one temporally prior to the other.<sup>63</sup> Others have suggested a Gnostic understanding of the physical, after the spiritual is reflected in this verse,<sup>64</sup> however, Kim rejects this, on the lack of evidence of a preChristian Gnostic redeemer myth.<sup>65</sup>

Although the identification of the Corinthian position remains as clouded in this verse as it is in other verses, it would seem fairly likely Paul's target is, once again, the Corinthian's over-realised eschatology. The statement is, therefore, both a summary of Paul's argument, and a repudiation of the Corinthian belief that they had already entered into the fullness of spiritual existence. Believing themselves to already be spiritual had a corollary in the rejection of the natural, and, consequently, of physical resurrection. Accordingly, Paul argues the πνευματικόν (spiritual) comes after the ψυχικόν (natural), in terms of both Adam and Christ, and in the two forms of

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<sup>61</sup> See Philo's exegesis of Gen 2:7 in Philo of Alexandria, "Allegorical Interpretation I", in *Philo*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1991, vol 1, p. 166-167.

<sup>62</sup> Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 375.

<sup>63</sup> Scroggs, *The Last Adam*, p. 122.

<sup>64</sup> Schmithals, *Gnosticism*, p. 169.

<sup>65</sup> Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel*, Tubingen Ger: Mohr, 1981, p. 163.

somatic existence, which Christians will experience.<sup>66</sup> It is a typological exegesis, in which Paul sees the first Adam prefiguring the last, and, consequently, the physical body pointing toward the spiritual.<sup>67</sup>

### Verse 47

#### ***The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven***

The text of this verse has undergone a number of revisions, including the deletion of ἄνθρωπος (man) and inclusion of ὁ κύριος (the Lord) by Marcion,<sup>68</sup> a Christological conflation of the text, through the addition of ὁ κύριος,<sup>69</sup> and the addition of πνευματικός (spiritual) or οὐράνιος (heavenly), as attempts to balance the ἐκ γῆς χοϊκός (out of the earth, earthly) in the first clause.<sup>70</sup>

In the previous verses, Paul used the Genesis citation to establish a typological foundation in the ψυχικόν (natural) and πνευματικόν (spiritual) of Adam and Christ. In verse 46, his concern was to demonstrate how one was to prevail, until the inauguration of the other. If, as has traditionally been done, ὁ δεύτερος ἄνθρωπος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ (the second man is out of heaven) is interpreted as being a statement on the origin of Christ, the priority, asserted by Paul in verse 46, would appear to be a stark contradiction.<sup>71</sup> The traditional interpretation need not be followed, allowing for the possibility of contradiction being eliminated.

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<sup>66</sup> Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, p. 267.

<sup>67</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet: Studies in the Role of the Heavenly Dimension in Paul's Thought with Special Reference to his Eschatology*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 43.

<sup>68</sup> Marcion was a second-century heretic, who denied Christ was born as a man, rather He simply appeared, hence this amendment.

<sup>69</sup> The King James Version, following the Majority Text.

<sup>70</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of I and II Corinthians*, p. 725; Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 787, n. 2.

<sup>71</sup> If Paul were to talk about the heavenly origin of Christ, in terms of His preexistence, he would be contradicting what he has said in verse 46. Paul is not, however, denying the preexistence of Christ, but this is not his primary concern, in the framework of this argument.

Paul returns to the language of Gen 2:7 in his description of the first man as ἐκ γῆς χοϊκός (out of the earth), paralleled, in the second half of the verse, by Paul's description of Christ as the ὁ δεύτερος ἄνθρωπος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ (the second man, out of heaven). The noun used by Paul in this sentence (γῆς) refers to ground, earth, or dirt.<sup>72</sup> It is duplicated by the use of χοϊκός (earthly), which has no parallel in the second half of the verse, and so, the emphasis that χοϊκός (out of earth) brings, should be understood qualitatively, rather than descriptively. The same principle is applied to the parallel phrase ἐξ οὐρανοῦ (out of heaven)<sup>73</sup>. ἐξ οὐρανοῦ needs to be understood as acting as the predicate to the rest of the phrase, describing the second man as heavenly, rather than from heaven.<sup>74</sup> As the context demands, Paul's concern is not so much with Christ's origins as His somatic existence. Verses 48 and 49 indicate Paul's concern to impress upon the Corinthian believers they share both the image of the earthly man Adam, and, through the resurrection of Christ, the image of the heavenly man.

#### **Verse 48**

***As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven***

Paul begins to draw his argument towards its conclusion, by further developing the typological concept he introduced in verse 47, and reiterating the priority he emphasised in verse 46. The overriding framework for verses 48 and 49 is the concept of εἰκόνα (image). By showing Adam and Christ are representative of those who belong to them, Paul is able to return to the central plank of his thesis, the nature of the resurrection body.

Once again, Paul reminds the Corinthians of an ontological reality. Like Adam, the first man who was χοϊκός (earthly), they, too, as his progeny, are earthly, sharing his characteristics. Paul continues this verse with another parallel phrase. However, this time, he changes the

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<sup>72</sup> Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 157.

<sup>73</sup> Lincoln, *Paradise*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

vocabulary, using the adjective, instead of the noun.<sup>75</sup> Scholars, who insisted ἄνθρωπος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ (man [who is] out of heaven) addressed Christ's origin, happily highlight the contrast, as it speaks of Christ's nature as a heavenly being.<sup>76</sup> The change in Paul's vocabulary must be accounted for, if the argument that Paul was not addressing Christ's origin in verse 47 is to be sustained. A simple solution presents itself. The parallelism, Paul established in this verse, prevented him from using ἄνθρωπος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ (the [man] from heaven), because οἱ ἐπουράνιοι (the heavenly ones) are not ἐξ οὐρανοῦ (out of heaven), in the same way Christ is. They are heavenly, only by virtue of the prior resurrection of Christ. (1 Cor 15:23.) The demonstrative pronoun, οἷος (such), indicates οἱ ἐπουράνιοι are only so, by virtue of their relationship to ὁ ἐπουράνιος (the heavenly one). In the context of Paul's argument, he is, once again, highlighting that those, who are in Christ, share the likeness of Jesus, whose resurrection has guaranteed they will share a heavenly body as well.<sup>77</sup>

#### Verse 49

***Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven***

In verse 49, Paul reiterates what he has just said, while modifying the metaphor he uses. The word ἐθορέσαμεν (bear) comes from the verb θορέω, which can refer to putting on, or bearing, clothing, a name, or, as is the case with this passage, an image. Paul has deliberately chosen this word for the context. It is a more intense word than a cognate that Paul might have used (θήρω), for θορέω has the sense that the object is put on continually.<sup>78</sup> Paul's deliberate metaphorical use of θορέω provides for another link between the εἰκῶν and the

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<sup>75</sup> ὁ ἐπουράνιος instead of ἄνθρωπος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ.

<sup>76</sup> E.g., Morris, *1 Corinthians*, p. 230.

<sup>77</sup> Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 794.

<sup>78</sup> Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 864; Morris, *1 Corinthians*, p. 231.

resurrection body, for, in other places, Paul speaks of the resurrection body as a garment to be put on.<sup>79</sup>

Unfortunately, Paul's description of when the Corinthians would begin sharing the heavenly likeness is complicated by a textual variant in the latter part of this verse. The UBS Greek text has chosen to adopt **θορέσομεν** (we shall bear) the future indicative, as the preferred vocabulary, despite the slender external support.<sup>80</sup> Accepting this selection, the Greek must be translated as "we shall wear", which means bearing the image of the heavenly man is in the future. Many commentators find this translation attractive, for a number of reasons.<sup>81</sup> Lenski argues it fits well with the didactic nature of the whole passage.<sup>82</sup> As the difficulty, the Corinthians have with the resurrection body, is caused by their over-realised eschatology, it seems inconceivable that Paul would call them **οἱ ἐπουράνιοι** (heavenly [ones]).

A small number of commentators uphold the integrity of the subjunctive **θορέσωμεν**. A number of things can be said in favour of this selection, which makes it the preferred rendering.

1. In the context of the Greek, this is the harder rendering, which supports its originality.
2. There does not have to be a stark antithesis of any kind, established by Paul between verse 48 and 49, where Paul speaks of two distinct groups in verse 48, and the implication of believers moving from one to the other in verse 49.<sup>83</sup> Verse 48 could be interpreted as speaking of

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<sup>79</sup> Lincoln, *Paradise*, p. 51.

<sup>80</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Stuttgart Ger: United Bible Societies, 1994, p. 502.

<sup>81</sup> E.g., Moffatt, *First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 263; Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 377; Conzelmann, *I Corinthians*, p. 288; Hodge, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 352; Lenski, *Interpretation of I and II Corinthians*, p. 729.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 729.

<sup>83</sup> So, F. W. Grosheide, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, London UK: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1954, p. 388.

the heavenly ones, in the present, the nominative case does not indicate a time aspect.

3. Paul's eschatological framework is reflected in the Adam/Christ analogy of 1 Cor 15, and is characterised by the existence of two ages. Earlier in this epistle, Paul spoke of the end of the age having come (1 Cor 10:11), the form of the world passing away (1 Cor 7:29, 31), and of a future age (1 Cor 13:10, 12.) Therefore, it is entirely consistent to believe Paul considered the Corinthians to already be participants in the putting on of the image of the heavenly man. Determination to see Paul opposing over-realised eschatology must not prevent the upholding of Paul's characteristically-balanced position of realised eschatology.
4. Paul's ethical concerns, reflected throughout 1 Cor, indicate his determination that the Corinthian's behaviour had to be consistent, as those who were no longer fully participants in life as *θεορέσωμεν*.

Such a conclusion fits entirely with the original thesis proposed, describing the Corinthian's objection to the resurrection of the body. They believed they were fully *πνευματικόν* (spiritual), Paul corrects this, but also asserts there is an overlap between the two stages of existence. They continue with existence in the earthly body, but, through their participation in the resurrection of Christ, they already bear the image of the heavenly one.

### **Application**

Paul's argument, in 1 Cor 42-49, fits very well into his overall eschatological framework that is there is an old system, which is in the process of passing away, and a new one being inaugurated, which is dependent on the death and resurrection of Christ. In the context of the Corinthian opposition, Paul had to assert the dichotomy between the old and the new carefully, lest he reinforce the belief, the Corinthians held, that they had already made it spiritually.

Contemporary Christians continue to debate the form that the resurrection body will take. This passage addresses the simultaneous continuity and discontinuity between the earthly body and the resurrection body, although the emphasis is on the resurrection body. There is a paucity of information in the scripture describing what the resurrection body will actually be like. Some guesses can be made on the nature of the resurrection body, based on the physical body of Christ, as He appeared to the disciples after His death, however, such assumptions must be made cautiously, for, at that stage, He had not ascended, and taken on His glorified body.

The central theological concern, Paul was addressing, was the over-realised eschatology that characterised the Corinthian church. Blomberg says, “Paul’s primary concern [was to] guard against an overly-realised eschatology that leads to an overly-triumphalist ecclesiology – that is, claiming, for the present era, too many of the blessings and victories of the age to come.”<sup>84</sup> This has a number of implications for mission and ministry in the Melanesian context.

1. The teaching about varieties of resurrection bodies, taught in cults, such as, the Mormons, must be rejected categorically. Though it may be necessary to concede our understanding of the exact nature of the resurrection body may be limited, there are some things, of which we can be certain.
2. There must be cautious assessment of ministries, which promote a “health and wealth” gospel. The Corinthians believed that, in many senses, they had “arrived”. They believed that the blessings of the age to come were already being manifest in them. Paul agreed with this, but cautioned them against holding an extreme view on the matter. Likewise, Christians can, and do, experience blessings in this life, but ministries, which exclusively promote a gospel of wealth, health, and prosperity are

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<sup>84</sup> Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, NIV Application Commentary, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1995, p. 320.

overstepping the mark, in the same way the Corinthians were. When they fail to deliver, such ministries leave the individual in a spiritually-perilous position.

3. Christians must work toward restoration of the image of God in fallen humanity. Paul does not here encourage the believers to sit back and do nothing, awaiting the day, when they will receive the blessings of the end of the age. Christians are exhorted by Paul to “put on the new self” (Eph 4:24), and to become more and more Christ-like.

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