

To this point in chapter 15 Apostle Paul has argued the case for Jesus' resurrection confirmed by hundreds of witnesses, its importance to believers, and the implication that we who are in Christ will also rise to new bodies that are like Jesus' resurrected body. Now in the passage for today, Paul gives us some insights into what those bodies will be like, at least as far as we are currently able to comprehend.

*<sup>35</sup> But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" <sup>36</sup> You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. <sup>37</sup> And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. <sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.* 1 Corinthians 15:35-38 Can we really believe that because Jesus was raised, we too will be raised? How is that even possible, and what kind of body would we have? We do not know if Paul is suggesting a potential question, or if it was reported to him that this was a question that was raised in Corinth. It is a question that comes up today. What about martyrs who were burned at the stake? How could their bodies be raised?

Is resurrection natural? Paul says it is. He is very blunt in saying it is a foolish question. We should see it in nature. Nature is our second Bible (Romans 1:20<sup>i</sup>), for it is God revealing Himself through the works of His hands. The God who created us and all spiritual truth created nature to illustrate His truths. That is why Jesus often used parables involving nature. If they just thought about what they are doing when they plant a crop, they would have seen the picture God has given us in creation. All plants and trees eventually die, but they leave behind seeds. A seed is buried before new life can spring forth. "Far from the decomposition of the body presenting an obstacle to the resurrection, it merely prepares us for the truth that the body that is raised is much more wonderful than the body that is buried."<sup>ii</sup> (See Job 19:26<sup>iii</sup>).

*To each kind of seed its own body.* We are like a seed. The seed does not look like the plant with its stalk, leaves, and flowers. In that sense it is dissimilar. But it is similar in that it has the DNA of the plant it came from and will sprout to life. We have a kind of spiritual DNA that determines our future heavenly bodies because we were born again (John 3:3<sup>iv</sup>). We must first die and be buried before we sprout to new life like that of our Savior who put within us a kind of spiritual DNA. Peter wrote that we are born-again not of perishable seed but of imperishable seed, through the living and abiding Word of God (1 Peter 1:23<sup>v</sup>). That is why we are raised to a body like His.

Jesus was asked a similar question by Sadducees in Matthew 22:23-33. The Sadducees did not believe in an afterlife, so they tried their best argument on Jesus <sup>24</sup> saying, "*Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.'*" <sup>25</sup> *Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother. <sup>26</sup> So too the second and third, down to the seventh. <sup>27</sup> After them all, the woman died. <sup>28</sup> In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her."* Matthew 22:24-28 That argument had probably stumped the Pharisees. But Jesus responded with Scripture. <sup>31</sup> *And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read*

*what was said to you by God: <sup>32</sup> 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.*" Matthew 22:31-32 He also told them that we do not marry in heaven. In other passages we find out that it is because we are all the bride of Christ (John 3:29<sup>vi</sup>; Revelation 19:7<sup>vii</sup>). Jesus used Scripture to prove to them that a proper understanding of the Torah always included an afterlife in which we have our unique identities. We can see that in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:23,24<sup>viii</sup>).

From Scripture we learn that we will recognize one another and will no longer be subject to entropy nor will creation. Hear how Paul described it in Romans 8. <sup>18</sup> *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* <sup>19</sup> *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.* <sup>20</sup> *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope* <sup>21</sup> *that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.* <sup>22</sup> *For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.* <sup>23</sup> *And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.* Romans 8:18-23 We have an inner sense that things are not as they should be. We see the devastation of sin in the earth and we long for a place we can call home where sin has no power. In that day, the curse will be lifted. Sin, death, and decay will be no more. What will trees that live forever be like? Maybe that is why the grand Sequoias invoke a sense of awe. We will be as different as a seed is to a full-grown plant. We do not yet have an idea of how different we will be from one another, but we know God loves variety. We see it everywhere in creation, and it will make heaven continually fascinating.

This concept was difficult for Greeks who believed the soul was good and would live on, but the body is evil and like a prison. That concept is opposite of the Biblical perspective. God created the body and said it was good (Genesis 1:31<sup>ix</sup>). It was the soul that became evil by choice in the fall. The body will express whatever the soul determines. The body is like an instrument that can be used for good or evil. While it is affected by the fall with sickness and death, by itself it is only a vehicle. Paul needed them to understand our heavenly bodies would be of another type. Another reason it was a difficult concept for them was that "the Greek idea that immortality involved the soul and was inherent to having a soul, as opposed to the Christian idea that eternal life or salvation is a gift that will affect both body and spirit..."<sup>x</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.* <sup>40</sup> *There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of 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.* 1 Corinthians 15:39-41 Look at the variety in nature that comes from a fertilized egg. There are bodies designed for earth, and bodies designed for sky, and some for life in water, but they vastly differ in the expressions of their inner qualities (glory), just as the sun, moon, and stars differ in their luminosity. All of these have a shape and purpose given by God. He is the one who

brings life from the seed. He wrote the DNA program, an intricate language which is evidence of a super-intelligent Creator. So naturally He would have a program to create heavenly bodies out of these earthly ones. If you had never seen a fish or an octopus and someone described them to you, you would wonder if they were real or if the person was making it up. But now we know of creatures deep in the ocean under immense pressure that live in the dark. If we see such amazing variety in God's created creatures, why is it so hard to grasp that it is possible for Him to give us resurrected bodies remade for the heavenly realm?

Then Paul brings up the heavenly bodies. Angels have bodies that are on a whole different level of glory. They are so awesome that when people see them, they fall on their faces and need to be strengthened just to be in their presence (Daniel 8:16-18<sup>xi</sup>). And from there Paul moves to the stars, planets, and moons. He knew nothing of the variety that lay beyond his vision. With space telescopes we can now see some of the wonders of the universe with dimensions that are hard to comprehend. He is pointing out the variety and astounding differences in creation.

*<sup>42</sup> So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. <sup>43</sup> It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. <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.* 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 We put these mortal bodies in the ground like a seed, and one day they will sprout as immortal bodies. The contrast is dishonor to glory, weakness to power, natural to spiritual. The natural bodies of those who are in Christ will rise as physical bodies the cells of which will be nourished by the Spirit rather than by blood. We do not have firsthand experience of this, but we can look at what Scripture says about Jesus' resurrected body and get an idea. It is as if entropy is reversed - but then one step further. The freedom of the soul is not escaping the body but rather seeing the soul in complete submission to the spirit.

The transformation of Jesus was such that they often did not recognize Him (Luke 24:16<sup>xii</sup>). The last time they saw Him His body was disfigured beyond that of any man by the abuse thrust upon Him (Isaiah 52:14<sup>xiii</sup>). That mangled body lay in the grave for days, and suddenly out walked a whole and super-healthy man. He was the same man of flesh and bone, but there was no blood in His body (Luke 24:39<sup>xiv</sup>). He could suddenly disappear at the table in Emmaus (Luke 24:31<sup>xv</sup>) and then appear with the apostles in Jerusalem. He ate fish in their presence (Luke 24:42,43<sup>xvi</sup>). He invited them to touch the crucifixion wounds, even stick their hand in hole made by the Roman spear (John 20:27<sup>xvii</sup>). He could cook a fish and bread on the shores of Galilee (John 21:9<sup>xviii</sup>), and He ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives (Luke 24:51<sup>xix</sup>).

We dream of having a body like that, one that can enjoy simple pleasures but is not bound by the limitations of earth and completely submitted to the Spirit of God. Praise God the Scriptures say it is a dream backed by a promise that cannot fail. *<sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.* Philippians 3:20-21 Take hold of this promise. Every time you are tempted to be discouraged because of a failure, or a physical weakness,

remember that redemption is drawing near. You have experienced trading in an old car for a newer one with all the new features and upgrades. That is nothing compared to trading in these bodies that are mortal for our immortal dwelling!

*<sup>45</sup> Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. <sup>46</sup> But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. <sup>47</sup> The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. <sup>48</sup> 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. <sup>49</sup> Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. 1*

Corinthians 15:45-49 Adam - the natural living being (Genesis 2:7<sup>xx</sup> the word “being” is literally “soul”) from whom not just our DNA came, but also our sin damaged souls that rebel against God. From Adam we inherit our physical bodies with mental ability to reason, our will, and emotions. But those in the last Adam (Jesus) have inherited from Him the spirit that enables us to have a relationship with the One who is a life-giving spirit (Romans 8:2<sup>xxi</sup>). Paul contrasts their origins, Adam of the earth and Christ from heaven. The natural man is born without a spirit. It is the spirit that died when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. Through Jesus we receive the life-giving spirit, which is more than breathing and moving. It is called eternal life (John 3:16<sup>xxii</sup>). It is union with God, elsewhere in Scripture referred to as sonship (Romans 8:15<sup>xxiii</sup>). That life giving spirit draws us to the Word and prayer and begins transforming the soul, the mind, will, and emotions that were corrupted by sin.

In the natural realm we can think of our fallen condition as having a gene that has mutated causing a fatal illness, sin, but Jesus provides the gene replacement that goes into our bone marrow (analogous to our spirit) and is reproduced in the way it was originally designed to be. But there will be a whole new gene added when we see Him. It is the immortal gene that changes the function of the entire body so that there is no longer decay. In Jesus, figuratively speaking, we get that spiritual DNA transfusion, His life-giving spirit will one day replace our blood. Even now we have the firstfruits of this change that is coming. The evidence is our freedom to deny ourselves and live for God.

There was a false teaching circulating that Jesus literally changes our DNA. That was probably drawn from this analogy. But it is much more than a physical DNA change. We become entirely new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17<sup>xxiv</sup>). In fact, Jesus will make all things new (Revelation 21:5<sup>xxv</sup>). And that is why the heart of man cannot imagine the things that God has prepared for those who love Him (2 Corinthians 2:9,10<sup>xxvi</sup>). But the following verse tells us God has revealed these things to us by the Spirit.

Adam, the natural man of the earth came first. Later Jesus, the life-giving man from heaven. We are all seeds like Adam, but we will all be planted and rise in the image of the man from heaven, the resurrected Jesus! If you are in Christ, you will bear the image of the man of heaven: sinless, immortal, only exhibiting the fruits of the Spirit, moving from place to place by only a thought, able to eat, not hindered by any barriers, touchable, and recognizable.

If you know by faith that this is the future of all who are in Christ, it should be one source of deep and abiding joy. That conviction takes away the fear of death and eases

the pain when those who are in Christ graduate before us. As our bodies deteriorate with age, we look forward to our heavenly bodies that will be unhindered by decay and sin.

This should also affect our attitudes toward one another. You can know that those flaws you see in yourself and in others will one day be gone. It helps us overlook them in others knowing that Jesus will perfect the work He started in us (Philippians 1:6<sup>xxvii</sup>). The misunderstandings and differences that divide us will be no more. What unity we will experience in heaven! We work toward it now and get a taste of it, but then it will be perfected. The majority of the older manuscripts have instead of “we shall bear the image,” “let us bear the image.” In other words, put on Christ now and let His life in us be seen now (Romans 13:14<sup>xxviii</sup>). Goodspeed translates it, “Let us also try to be like the man from heaven.” As Scriptural as that may be, the context bears out the future bearing the image of the man from heaven upon our resurrection.

Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. The same God who planned the metamorphosis of the butterfly can do the same with us. Biologists still have no idea how that transformation of a caterpillar to a butterfly takes place. The cycle begins when the mother butterfly lays her eggs. From the egg hatches a small caterpillar. It gorges itself on leaves until it is big and fat and then does a strange thing. It attaches itself to a stem and forms a chrysalis around itself. Inside that chrysalis the caterpillar’s entire being, its legs, eyes, chewing mouth and all turns into a soup. Then inside the soup a few cells begin to move. A fully formed butterfly is formed from the soup, breaks out its chrysalis, spreads its beautiful wings and flies off.

Fellow caterpillars, if you have trusted Christ the very life of our Savior is in our spirits. It does not matter how far your ashes are scattered, the One who designed the butterfly has shown us He can do anything. While your spirit goes to be with God upon death, one day, the elements of your old body will begin to move and will come together and form something much more beautiful than a butterfly. We will bear the image of the man of heaven. Keep looking up. Our redemption is drawing near (Luke 21:28<sup>xxix</sup>; Isaiah 60:8<sup>xxx</sup>)! We live for but a moment here to choose where we will spend eternity. For those who choose Christ this glorious promise awaits us. The older these bodies become, the closer we are to being home (2 Corinthians 5:8<sup>xxxi</sup>). Do not grow weary in doing good, for the season will come in which we reap, if we do not give up (Galatians 6:9<sup>xxxii</sup>).

Questions:

- 1 What question is Paul addressing?
- 2 What does he compare it to in nature?
- 3 What was Jesus’ answer to the Sadducees similar question?
- 4 How was the Greek idea different from the biblical view?
- 5 Why did Paul mention the variety in creation?
- 6 What does Jesus’ resurrected body teach us?
- 7 What did we inherit from Adam? From Jesus?
- 8 How should this instruction affect our daily attitudes?
- 9 Review the metamorphosis of a caterpillar.
- 10 What happens when a believer dies?

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<sup>i</sup> **Romans 1:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

<sup>ii</sup> Leon Morris, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 1 Corinthians revised edition, p.220

<sup>iii</sup> **Job 19:26 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God,

<sup>iv</sup> **John 3:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

<sup>v</sup> **1 Peter 1:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

<sup>vi</sup> **John 3:29 (ESV)**

<sup>29</sup> The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.

<sup>vii</sup> **Revelation 19:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready;

<sup>viii</sup> **Luke 16:23-24 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. <sup>24</sup> And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.'

<sup>ix</sup> **Genesis 1:31 (ESV)**

<sup>31</sup> And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

<sup>x</sup> Ben Witherington *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, Eerdmans, 1995 p 307

<sup>xi</sup> **Daniel 8:16-18 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, and it called, "Gabriel, make this man understand the vision." <sup>17</sup> So he came near where I stood. And when he came, I was frightened and fell on my face. But he said to me, "Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end." <sup>18</sup> And when he had spoken to me, I fell into a deep sleep with my face to the ground. But he touched me and made me stand up.

<sup>xii</sup> **Luke 24:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

<sup>xiii</sup> **Isaiah 52:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> As many were astonished at you— his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—

<sup>xiv</sup> **Luke 24:39 (ESV)**

<sup>39</sup> See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

<sup>xv</sup> **Luke 24:31 (ESV)**

<sup>31</sup> And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight.

<sup>xvi</sup> **Luke 24:42-43 (ESV)**

<sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup> and he took it and ate before them.

<sup>xvii</sup> **John 20:27 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."

<sup>xviii</sup> **John 21:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread.

<sup>xix</sup> **Luke 24:51 (ESV)**

<sup>51</sup> While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.

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<sup>xx</sup> **Genesis 2:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

<sup>xxi</sup> **Romans 8:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

<sup>xxii</sup> **John 3:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

<sup>xxiii</sup> **Romans 8:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”

<sup>xxiv</sup> **2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

<sup>xxv</sup> **Revelation 21:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

<sup>xxvi</sup> **1 Corinthians 2:9-10 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”— <sup>10</sup> these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

<sup>xxvii</sup> **Philippians 1:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

<sup>xxviii</sup> **Romans 13:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

<sup>xxix</sup> **Luke 21:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

<sup>xxx</sup> **Isaiah 60:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> Who are these that fly like a cloud, and like doves to their windows?

<sup>xxxi</sup> **2 Corinthians 5:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

<sup>xxxii</sup> **Galatians 6:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.