

The Nature of the Resurrection and Afterlife Considerations

The Apostle Paul records for us a question which was presented by those who were casting aspersions and disbelief upon the doctrine of Christian resurrection. At 1 Corinthians 15:35 we read: "Nevertheless, someone will say: 'How are the dead to be raised up? Yes, with what sort of body are they coming?'"

That question and the answer given by the Apostle Paul sets the stage for this presentation. What exactly is resurrected and how does the answer to that question affect the common views of afterlife that are taught within the different religions claiming to be Christian? This is of no small consequence for it touches upon the very core of afterlife teachings prior to and after the resurrection. It affects the view of whether or not there is an undying or immortal soul (some teach that the soul is not immortal but that it still lives on after the death of the body until the judgment where it can be destroyed) that needs no resurrection and whether it is the actual body of flesh that is resurrected or something else, which is referred to by the Apostle Paul as the "bare grain". What does Paul mean by the "bare grain" and what did he teach in the following context in answer to the scoffer's question that asked "with what sort of body are they coming?".

Those who believe in the immortal or undying soul that survives the body at death, and continues a conscious existence (in either a good or bad situation) have forced upon themselves the necessity of believing that it is the fleshly body that is the object of the resurrection. There is simply no other choice for them to believe so since an undying or immortal soul that remains conscious after death needs no resurrection to life. There are a number of references that are used in an attempt to prove that it is the fleshly body that is resurrected as opposed to something else, which we will consider as this article progresses.

On the other hand, there is little information available to us in God's Word that is as explicit when it comes to explaining the nature of the resurrection as is the 15th chapter of Corinthians, and naturally so, because this is exactly where the nature of the resurrection body was being questioned and an answer was being supplied. Of course, one can hardly ignore the ramifications of 2 Corinthians 5:1-9, where we also see a context involving the body and resurrection. So let us first consider these chapters and what they explicitly tell us about the resurrection body. Then we can take these explicit findings and use them as a guide to understanding the less explicit and ambiguous statements found elsewhere. We will then address the common opposing views to this understanding to see if they serve as a means to overturn what is derived from the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians and the 5th chapter of 2 Corinthians.

CONCERNING 1 COR. 15:

Verse 15:36:.... "What you sow does not come to life unless it dies."

This explicitly establishes that the thing sown is that which is resurrected. It is important to keep that in mind as we progress through this analogy of seeds and plants and bodies.

Verse 15:37: "When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else."

How much plainer could it be that the SEED and the BODY are TWO NUMERICALLY DIFFERENT THINGS. Paul clearly establishes here that the thing which is sown is something other than the body which arises. Now, if the body is not SOWN, then according to verse 36, it is NOT THE THING coming BACK to life. Paul clearly establishes here that something OTHER THAN THE BODY that arises is what was sown. Since the thing that dies must be that which rises (according to verse 36) this unmistakably tells us that something other than the BODY is DYING in order to COME TO LIFE AGAIN. But whatever it is that comes to life AGAIN, it can't be the body--not according to Paul in this analogy.

This is an extremely important point to remember because at the very outset of this passage those who promote the resurrection of the fleshly body are met with an immediate and explicit contradiction to their teaching. Since they teach that the body that arises is that body which died (which they must teach in order to have a resurrection happening) it stands in direct contrast to what Paul here tells us. Paul explicitly states that the thing sown is not that body which arises. In other words, the body that arises at the resurrection is NOT that which was sown. But how can that be if, according to the above mentioned teachers, the body that died is that which is sown, and is the same body that comes back? They have created a catch 22 for themselves and a contradiction. The body arising is not the old body, clearly due to the fact that Paul said the arising body is NOT that which was sown.

This reminds us of something that Jesus Christ himself said in a similar context. Jesus states at John 12:24,25 in an illustration of a bare grain, the same picture used here, of

dying and coming to life. Verse 25 clearly establishes that he was speaking of the soul as the bare grain that would come back alive. This two-fold witness of scripture is a powerful testimony to the fact that something other than the body dies. That something is the soul according to Jesus in this passage.

Let's continue with the analysis of 1 Cor. 15:

Verse 15:38: "God gives it a body as he has determined. And to each kind of seed he gives its own body."

Further confirming that the body which arises in the resurrection is not the thing that was sown, Paul tells us that the thing that was sown and comes to life is GIVEN a body. This solidifies the point that the 'body' was not that which was sown, for if the body is that which was sown and that body is coming back to life and is arising, there is no need to give THAT body a BODY. It would BE the body. Rather, he is telling us that the bare grain, the SEED, which he already established was NOT the BODY that arises, is GIVEN a body. In harmony with Jesus' words above, it would be the soul in the sense of the person which returns and is GIVEN a body as it pleases God. This resurrected soul, or person, is given a body that pleases God. And notice Paul allows for different kinds of bodies by saying "to EACH KIND of seed its OWN body". This also helps us to appreciate that all those seeds, those bare grains, will not necessarily have the same kind of body in the resurrection.

Just from the above verses, it should be profoundly clear that Paul is trying to tell us that the BODY is not the object of the resurrection, but the SEED is. And if the SEED is not the BODY, then something else besides the BODY dies and is sown and is raised in the resurrection. This helps us to appreciate why Paul could tell these scoffers that they were unreasonable. The scoffers were wanting to know what sort of body would be raised. The reason Paul could tell them that they were unreasonable is because he explains to them that the body is not being raised anyway, but something else is. That something is that bare grain. He could not call them unreasonable if he was telling them that a body was actually being resurrected, brought back to life. How could he call them unreasonable when their question then would have been appropriate and entirely reasonable? The very fact that there is not a body that is being raised is what gives him the correctness of calling them unreasonable. Otherwise, they weren't unreasonable at all for asking their question.

Let's continue with 1 Cor. 15:

Verse 39-42

(1 Corinthians 15:39-42) ³⁹ Not all flesh is the same flesh, but there is one of mankind, and there is another flesh of cattle, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. ⁴⁰ And there are heavenly bodies, and earthly bodies; but the glory of the heavenly bodies is one sort, and that of the earthly bodies is a different sort. ⁴¹ The glory of the sun is one sort, and the glory of the moon is another, and the glory of the stars is another; in fact, star differs from star in glory. ⁴² So also is the resurrection of the dead....

Paul here explains what he means when he earlier stated that God gives it a body that pleases him. He is showing, via analogy, how there are naturally many different kinds of bodies that could be potentially bestowed by God in the resurrection for he says "so also is the resurrection of the dead". Then he goes on to explain the resurrection of those whom he was writing the letter to, the Corinthian Christians, those who will partake of the first resurrection. The same idea is stressed through the following verses that it can not be the body that is the object of the resurrection. Notice:

(1 Corinthians 15:42-49) . . . It is sown in corruption, it is raised up in incorruption. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor, it is raised up in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised up in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a physical body, it is raised up a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual one. ⁴⁵ It is even so written: "The first man Adam became a living soul." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the first is, not that which is spiritual, but that which is physical, afterward that which is spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man is out of the earth and made of dust; the second man is out of heaven. ⁴⁸ As the one made of dust [is], so those made of dust [are] also; and as the heavenly one [is], so those who are heavenly [are] also. ⁴⁹ And just as we have borne the image of the one made of dust, we shall bear also the image of the heavenly one.

The Christian would be sown in corruption due to the fact that (a) flesh is corruptible (in the sense of it being subject to decay) and (b) that flesh still has imperfection within it. However, upon resurrection, the corruptible part will be replaced. It will not exist. It is replaced by incorruption which means the imperfection will be gone and they will have spirit bodies which cannot decay -- as we will see as we continue through these verses.

The Christians would also be sown in dishonor because of the sin and imperfection within the flesh but upon his resurrection to perfect and sinless immortal life, that

dishonor will have been ridded from him. Also, the Christian would be sown in weakness again to the same conditions of fallen flesh but would be freed of that upon resurrection.

Then comes the next phrase which is very important to this discussion. For the Christians of the first resurrection, they would be sown in a physical sense and again raised in a state where that “physicalness” would be ridded from them. What though is meant by this physicalness? Is it in reference to “sinful” flesh, or in their case, is it a reference to their actual physical bodies that they would be ridded of? Fortunately, the following context makes that identification possible. Notice what Paul states right after he said that they would be raised spiritual after sown physical. He says:

(1 Corinthians 15:44-49) . . . If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual one.
⁴⁵ It is even so written: “The first man Adam became a living soul.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the first is, not that which is spiritual, but that which is physical, afterward that which is spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man is out of the earth and made of dust; the second man is out of heaven. ⁴⁸ As the one made of dust [is], so those made of dust [are] also; and as the heavenly one [is], so those who are heavenly [are] also. ⁴⁹ And just as we have borne the image of the one made of dust, we shall bear also the image of the heavenly one.

So just as Paul said earlier that there were many different kinds of bodies, he now uses that established fact to state that if there is such a thing as a physical body, then there is also such a thing as a spiritual body. What though does he mean by this contrast? Again, he goes on to explain. He states the first man Adam came to be a living soul, the last Adam, a life giving SPIRIT. Remember that Adam was not made a “sinful” soul but was made free from sin and the effects of fallen flesh. As Paul continues he explains that Adam was made of DUST and contrasts that with the second Adam out of heaven. The “physicalness” according to the context is not in reference to sin and imperfection, but is in reference to the fact that Adam was DUST but the second Adam became a SPIRIT. Just as the corruption, dishonor and weakness would all be done away with via the first resurrection, likewise with the DUST. Just as Jesus became a SPIRIT, so would they. This is in complete harmony with and a confirmation of what Paul said earlier that the BODY is not the object of the resurrection because these ones who receive of the first resurrection would become SPIRITS, with spirit bodies, just as Jesus Christ received upon HIS resurrection.

Next we read another statement of confirmation to the above information.

(1 Corinthians 15:50) ⁵⁰ However, this I say, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom, neither does corruption inherit incorruption.

Much discussion ensues over what is meant by 'flesh and blood'. Most teach that it is just a reference for the fallen flesh in its sinful state and thus try and escape the conclusion that it simply refers to the human substance. What do the scriptures tell us about this phrase and how it is used?

There are four other places we see these two words come together where they are joined by 'and' (kai) in the Christian Greek scriptures.

Hebrews 2:14: Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;

This verse demonstrates that the Son himself partook of 'flesh and blood', which by necessity tells us this phrase is NOT in relation to sin and the fallen flesh, for Jesus partook the same of neither sin nor the fallen flesh. The phrase was in reference to the substance that humans are made of. The Son existed as spirit before his sojourn in the flesh but he partook of the flesh when he became man.

Ephesians 6:12: For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high [places].

If 'flesh and blood' is just a reference to the sinful nature of the fallen flesh, then Paul's statement here would not be true because we DO wrestle against our own fallen flesh and sinful nature -- as Paul and others testify to elsewhere. Again, this is a reference to that substance that humans are made of as contrasted with those wicked spirit forces.

Galatians 1:16-To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

Paul was not in reference to conferring with his sin and fallen flesh, he was in reference to not conferring with men as compared to the fact that his apostleship was based upon a spiritual encounter with Christ, not flesh and blood.

Matthew 16:17-And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed [it] unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

Once again, Jesus was not in reference to sin and fallen flesh revealing something to Peter, but was speaking of the fact that the Father, who is spirit, revealed it to him. Not men. Not flesh and blood.

In each case, we see the phrase used with a signified contrast between one nature and the other. There is nothing in the phrase which lends itself to the strict interpretation of 'sin and fallen flesh'. In fact, none of the references lend themselves to that interpretation but can be readily seen as a means of contrasting the substance of humanity with spiritual substance.

Therefore, Paul's teaching about the object of the resurrection is harmonious and conclusive throughout the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians. But there is more to consider. Not only do we need to consider the further words of Paul at 2 Cor. 5, but also in looking at the example of the resurrected Christ and how it was that he was resurrected and what was to become of the flesh and blood that he sacrificed.

NOW CONCERNING 2 COR: 5:

(2 Corinthians 5:1-9) **1 For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, should be dissolved, we are to have a building from God, a house not made with hands, everlasting in the heavens.**

Here we are told by Paul that the earthly tent would be dissolved and they would receive another tent, or home, from God, one NOT MADE WITH HANDS, and everlasting in the heavens.

Some have interpreted this to mean the disembodied state of the immortal soul between death and resurrection, but this will not do according to context at all. First of all, that condition is not taught to be everlasting in the heavens, but temporary, because it is taught that the body will rejoin the disembodied soul upon resurrection. The naked state of the person or soul, is what Paul would have referred to in verse 3 as unfavorable and is contrasted with having a body, a home, either the earthly body, or the everlasting home not made with hands in heaven. The context here is unquestionably resurrection.

What is meant by the phrase “not made with hands”? We are given a definition by the writer of Hebrews as to what is meant by this terminology.

(Hebrews 9:11) ¹¹ However, when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come to pass, through the greater and more perfect tent not made with hands, that is, not of this creation,

Not made with hands is described as referring to something “not of this creation”. But if we are to possess our fleshly bodies in heaven upon resurrection, the same one that died on earth, how could it be said that the new home would be “not of this creation” when it clearly would be?

Let’s continue with 2 Cor. 5:

² For in this dwelling house we do indeed groan, earnestly desiring to put on the one for us from heaven, ³ so that, having really put it on, we shall not be found naked.

Paul makes another clear contrast between the earthly home (body) and the heavenly home (body), not being desirous of the naked state.

⁴ In fact, we who are in this tent groan, being weighed down; because we want, not to put it off, but to put on the other, that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ Now he that produced us for this very thing is God, who gave us the token of what is to come, that is, the spirit.

The token of that which is to come is the SPIRIT, which reminds us of what Paul taught at 1 Cor. 15. Jesus became a life-giving SPIRIT upon his resurrection in contrast to the man Adam who became a physical(dust) soul when he received life.

⁶ We are therefore always of good courage and know that, while we have our home in the body, we are absent from the Lord, ⁷ for we are walking by faith, not by sight. ⁸ But we are of good courage and are well pleased rather to become absent from the body and to make our home with the Lord.

Paul makes it clear that as long as they have their home in the body (the earthly tent) they will not have their home (resurrected body) with the Lord. Why? Simply because, as he declared in his first letter to them, “Flesh and blood does not inherit the kingdom”. To

live in heaven one must be a spirit being, not a human being. They must be spirit as Jesus became upon his resurrection and as are God and the angels. Paul's teaching is consistent and explicit as to the fact that the earthly body is not the object of the resurrection.

This harmonious teaching between 1 Cor. 15 and 2 Cor. 5 is manifested throughout the scriptures in many other ways. For instance, the Apostle Peter also testifies to this contrast of bodies in the resurrection when he speaks of the case of Jesus Christ.

He states (1 Peter 3:18) ¹⁸ [Why, even Christ died once for all time concerning sins, a righteous \[person\] for unrighteous ones, that he might lead YOU to God, he being put to death in the flesh, but being made alive in the spirit.](#)

Since the phraseology is the same between "put to death in the flesh" and "made alive in the spirit", it stands to reason that "put to death in the flesh" refers to him being put to death as a human. In the Greek text the words "flesh" and "spirit" are put in contrast to each other, and both are in the dative case; so, if a translator uses the rendering "by the spirit" he should also consistently say "by the flesh," or if he uses "in the flesh" he should also say "in the spirit." Therefore, the following phrase would mean, in context, that he was raised to life "IN the" spirit, the same as Paul declared in 1 Cor. 15.

Also, in the case of Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection, we are taught from the scriptures that the blood and flesh of Christ were a sacrifice for our sins. In this sacrifice, Christ is paralleled with the sacrifices of the law Covenant, he being the ultimate fulfillment of what those sacrifices typified. Jesus, like the Israelite offerings which typified him, sacrificed his body, flesh, bone and blood. As in the case of all sacrifices, that which was sacrificed was not taken back by the one sacrificing it. Otherwise, there was no sacrifice and the sacrifice would be void. If Jesus took back that which he sacrificed, then there could be no actual sacrifice. It would be a violation to the entire Biblical pattern involving the meaning behind SACRIFICE. Since the ransom was paid by means of that sacrifice, taking back what was sacrificed would take back the ransom payment and we, as the human race, would be lost in our sins. This alone should tell us that Jesus could not take back his body of flesh upon his resurrection. If he did, there was no sacrifice and there was no ransom payment.

In spite of this clear and consistent Biblical teaching about the nature of the resurrection, most of the world of Christendom would object. They would claim that the example of Jesus Christ and his resurrection scenarios proves something very different. Plus, there are a few verses that are offered to try and overturn what has been established above. We will take a brief look at these claims and weigh their validity.

For example, they will point to John 2:19, 21. Is it fair to state Jesus speaks in a metaphor which the Jews misunderstood? Later, before his Jewish judges, he is condemned on the basis of this statement. We should note that in a literal case, the old torn-down materials are never used to rebuilt a new building. What is used are new materials. Jesus does not say exactly which type of body he will raise, so this is not conclusive in any manner that Jesus rose the old body from the grave. If Jesus agrees with his inspired disciple Paul, he must raise a spirit body --- a spirit-like body lacking flesh and blood and thus able to inherit the Kingdom. (1 Corinthians 15:50) Peter had heard Jesus make this statement to the Jews, but Peter did not understand this to mean Jesus would raise a human body of flesh and blood as we have seen. (1 Peter 3:18)

There is also another way to look at what Jesus said about the raising of this temple. Is it not possible that Jesus was making a reference to his post-resurrection manifestations of his old body and not to the actual resurrection? Manifesting himself via an appearance is what he could have referred to as "raising that temple", not the act of the resurrection. Therefore, John 2:19,21 offers no problem to the above mentioned conclusions.

Another text often used is Luke 24:39, "Feel me and see, because a spirit does not have flesh and bones just as you behold that I have." We would hardly expect Jesus to contradict Paul and Peter who both state that he was raised a "spirit." (1 Corinthians 15:45; 1 Peter 3:18) What is the problem here? If we note the context, Jesus has made a sudden appearance and this frightens the disciples, as the account states, " ... they thought they were beholding a spirit." (Luke 24:37) Many modern versions clarify the matter for us: "They thought they were looking at a ghost. Jesus said ghosts have no flesh and bones." Luke consistently uses the word "spirit", when in reference to beings, to refer to EVIL spirits. All Jesus was confirming for his disciples was that they were not experiencing a wicked spirit manifestation, but that it was really him. The fact that he allowed them to touch him would prove to them that what they saw was no demon. The fact that he ate food with them is no different than when the angels ate and drank with Abraham upon their appearance to him concerning Sodom and Gomorrah.

The materialized body of the Jesus Christ was what God had GRANTED so Jesus could become visible or manifest to his disciples as Peter, an eyewitness states, "This (Jesus) The God raised up on the third day and He granted (Jesus) to become manifest, not to all the people, but to witnesses appointed beforehand." (Acts 10:40, 41) It should be obvious that these "manifestations", often into locked rooms and followed by disappearances, was often for the benefit of those witnesses to the resurrection and the result of God granting his Son to become visible by such means even as did angels in the past. (Genesis chapters 18 and 19)

Another text given a different twist by different ones is Philippians 3:21: "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." (KJV) This

verse is variously rendered: ASV: fashion anew the body of our humiliation; RHM: transfigure our humbled body; GDSP: will make our poor bodies over; NJB: will transfigure the wretched body of ours into the mould of his glorious body; RSV: transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory.

Is it fair to conclude that this text does not say the fleshly human body will go to heaven in the resurrection at the Parousia of Christ? There seems to be two body-types here: the present humiliated body; and, the glorious body of Christ. What exactly is involved in this "transformation" must be judged by 1 Corinthians chapter 15. At the Parousia Paul says "we shall all be changed." The Greek word in Philippians 3:21 rendered "fashion" or "transform" is *metaschematisei*, or to change the "schematic", like a change to suit the occasion. The transformation occurs through the very process of resurrection. Nothing more needs to be demanded by what is said.

All things considered, particularly Paul's thorough discussion of the resurrection subject, it seems strange that if Christ were raised in the same human body laid in the tomb, Paul would not mention this. Also, no text specifically states that Jesus was raised in the flesh. Rather, the Bible is clear and straightforward that Jesus "was put to death in the flesh but raised in the spirit" and that upon his resurrection he became a "a life-giving spirit" (1 Peter 3:18; 1 Cor. 15:45)

Therefore, the scriptures are consistent throughout that the object of the resurrection is not the old body that has died. That's the entire reason behind Paul's charge that those resurrection scoffers were unreasonable. There is no BODY that is being resurrected to begin with, it is the soul, the person, that bare grain, remembered by God in whatever form is necessary for remembrance and their future continuity of 'self', restored upon resurrection and GIVEN a body as it pleases our God. The true Biblical teaching about the resurrection destroys the notion that there is a disembodied soul that consciously exists between the state of death and the resurrection, for if it is not the body that is resurrected, there is nothing else left to resurrect, to bring back to life except but the person, the soul, the bare grain.