

THE SPIRITUAL BODY:

1 CORINTHIANS 15

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for

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In 1 Co 15, Paul treats of the resurrection of the dead and of the transformation of those living "at the last trumpet," i.e., at the Parousia of the Lord Jesus. The Apostle is involved in polemics with certain opponents, perhaps Gnosticizers, who seem to deny at least the resurrection of the dead (v. 12), or understand resurrection as something that has already occurred for those who belong to Christ (1); at least, the body would not be involved in any resurrection of the dead (v. 35). Against these views, Paul reminds the brethren of the Gospel: Christ died and was buried, and rose and appeared to many; if Christ has not been raised, your faith is in vain and our preaching is also, because then all, including Christ, perish, and those now alive (and presumably also those who have died) are still in their sins (this applied to those who are dead only in so far as they still exist, perhaps as shades in Hades or Sheol). "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are more pitiful than all men" (v. 19). In other words, if what we are now is all that we can hope to be, ours is a sorry lot, because living for Christ goes hand in hand with opprobrium and persecution (cf. vv. 30ff.)

But Christ has indeed been raised as the first fruits of those who have died (v. 20ff.), and he will return at the end and all who belong to him shall also be made alive.

Now that Paul has put the importance of an eschatological resurrection in the proper perspective, from v. 35 on he discusses the resurrection of the dead and the new, spiritual body which we shall have at the end. His discussion starts off in a polemical context: "How are the dead raised? And with what sort of body do they come?" The Jewish view of resurrection, represented by the Pharisees, was that corpses would be revived and get out of their graves 'dressed in their shrouds' (2). If this idea is gory to us all, it was even more problematical for Greeks, who longed to be freed from their bodies so that their souls might no longer be tied down to material, limiting things.

Paul is a Jew who cannot conceive of disembodied existence. A person for him is a totality and not composed, as for the dualistic Greeks, of two elements at odds with one another. This is true even when he can, according to his tradition, speak of a person's spirit, mind, flesh, psyche, etc. (3) The person, as a totality that is embodied, after his or her earthly existence (all too well known to us) will continue in a heavenly existence which we, like Paul, can only have a small inkling about.

In vv. 37-41, Paul states that there are different kinds of bodies, including celestial ones, perhaps conceived of as living beings (4); the Stoics, who influenced the whole Hellenistic world, could conceive of "spiritual bodies" composed of "very fine or highly attenuated matter," and therefore "not immaterial" (5). Such a body could consist of "breath" (πνεῦμα), a combination of air and fire (6). But we do not believe that this is what the Apostle has in mind when he talks about a σῶμα πνευμα-
ΤΙΚόν.

In vv. 42-50, Paul contrasts two different kinds of existence, the earthly and the heavenly, to illustrate how it is with the resurrection of the dead. Our existence now is perishable (we will die, "our outer nature is wasting away" 2 Co 4:16); we are subject to dishonor and are weak: this is the nature of our earthly life in a "lowly body" (Ph 3:21). This is our lot as descendants of the first man Adam, a 'living being, from the earth, from dust, flesh and blood'. This is also a sinful condition, a "body of death" (Rom 7:24), our "bodies are dead because of sin" (Rom 8:10). Our earthly nature, as it is, cannot be part of the fullness of God's re-created 'new heaven and new earth' where 'all things are new' (Rev 21). "I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable" (v. 50).

A miracle will be necessary --and is promised-- so that the earthly existence be changed into one of imperishability, glory and power, i.e., into a spiritual body, after that of the last Adam, " a life-giving spirit," from heaven, Christ. Here Paul "adopts the prevailing view of the spiritual body of the exalted Lord" (7). we shall be like Christ (Rom 8:29), even like his "glorious body" (Ph 3:21). "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven" (v. 49). This new body shall be ours when the Lord returns (cf. 1 Ts 4:15ff.); "we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet" (v. 52). It is of course impossible for us to imagine what sort of "event" this will be; these things are unseen and eternal (2 Cor 4:18).

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We cannot say, following Paul, much more about the spiritual body we shall have. He calls it "our heavenly dwelling" which we "long to put on" "so that we may not be found naked" (2 Cor 5:2f.). Schweizer says that in 1 Cor 15 reference is made to the stuff from which the first man was made, but that reference is made to ^{vs} origin regarding the man from heaven. 'So that the σῶμα πνευματικόν is not one which consists of πνεῦμα, but one that is controlled by it' (8). He believes that Rom 8:11 does not mean that substance is guaranteed, but that the Spirit (of Christ) who worked with the righteous while they were in their mortal bodies will continue to work in the same individuals after their death, after they have risen.

"Body" is then to be understood in relational terms, not in terms of physical substance. This is illustrated by 1 Cor 6:13ff. The body there is different from the belly, which does not participate in the resurrection ^{Schweizer} (9). And 'that "body" can be absorbed by "us" shows that for Paul the sexual act is controlled especially by personal relationship. The union of the believer with Christ, though bodily, is thought of in personal rather than physical terms' (10). We therefore see that "body" is not to be identified with any of its material aspects, and that the use Paul makes of this word is not always to be confused with the Greek notion of external form (11).

belly + food to be destroyed body raised

Schweizer also says that the spirit, besides being a miraculous power, 'is a norm by which we must strive to live; we must accept as norm that power which shapes our life' (12). And this indeed is a constant theme of Paul's. 'Though our outer nature

is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day' (2 Cor 4:16), 'always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies' (v. 10). 'He who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary in well-doing' (Gal 6:8f.). 'You are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit' (Rom 8:9). 'Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness' (Eph 4:22ff., at least in the Pauline spirit).

Therefore, as Schweizer expounds (13), we await the redemption of our body, not from our body (Rom 8:23). 'The body (man) in earthly life bears sin and death, not as the result of corporeality; and we may break free from this, this must begin to appear now (as a body being raised up). This is what makes life in the body so responsible'.

In the words of Fulgentius of Ruspe: 'The reward of future transformation is promised to those who have effectuated the transmutation from evil to good, so that the transformation by divine grace begins here by justification, by which we already rise spiritually, and later by the resurrection of the body, which fulfills justification and, remaining perfect for eternity, glorification will not change.' (14).

FOOTNOTES (The names refer to the bibliography.)

- (1) Cf. Bultmann, p. 178.
- (2) Cf. Davies, p. 305.
- (3) Cf. Bultmann, pp. 192-245.
- (4) Cf. Barrett, p. 371.
- (5) Hatch, p. 9.
- (6) Cf. Sandbach, p. 73.
- (7) Schweizer VI, p. 422.
- (8) Ibid., p.421.
- (9) Cf. ibidem.
- (10) Ibidem.
- (11) Cf. Schweizer VII, p. 1061.
- (12) Schweizer VI, p. 428.
- (13) Schweizer VII, p. 1061f.
- (14) Fulgentius, p. 801f.

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