

The Resurrection of the Body

Anthony A. Hoekema

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY IS CENTRAL TO THE BIBLE'S eschatological message. As was noted earlier, there is a radical difference between the Christian view of man and the Greek view. According to the Greek philosophers, man's body is evil and is a hindrance to his full existence. Hence at death the body disintegrates while the soul lives on—there is here no hope for a bodily resurrection. The Bible, on the contrary, teaches that God created man body and soul, and that man is not complete apart from his body. Both the incarnation and the bodily resurrection of Christ prove that the body is not evil but good. Because Christ arose from the dead, all who are Christ's shall also arise with glorified bodies. Though those who have died in Christ now enjoy a provisional happiness during the intermediate state, their happiness will not be complete until their bodies have been raised from the dead. The resurrection of the body, therefore, is a uniquely Christian doctrine.

Before we discuss the nature of the resurrection, we must concern ourselves with the question of the time of the resurrection. We have already seen that both historic and dispensational premillennialists separate the resurrection of believers from that of unbelievers by a thousand years. All premillennialists teach that the resurrection of believers will occur at the beginning of the millennium, while the resurrection of unbelievers will take place at the end of the millennium. Dispensationalists add to these two resurrections two more: the resurrection of tribulation saints at the end of the seven-year tribulation, and the resurrection of millennial saints at the end of the millennium.³

We must now face the question of whether the Bible teaches such a two-stage or four-stage resurrection. The chief point at issue here is the teaching common to both types of premillennialism that there will be a thousand-year interval between the resurrection of believers and that of unbelievers. The following considerations may be advanced against this view:

First, the Bible represents the resurrection of believers and unbelievers as occurring together. One of the outstanding Old Testament passages dealing with the resurrection of the dead is Daniel 12:2, "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." Notice that the passage mentions the resurrection of the godly and that of the wicked in the same breath, with no indication that the resurrection of these two groups shall be separated by a long period of time.

Very clear on this matter are the words of Jesus found in John 5:28–29, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his [the Son of man's] voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment." Here too we find the resurrection of believers and the resurrection of unbelievers mentioned together. It is specifically said by Jesus, "the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth." The clear implication seems to be that at a certain specific time, here called the coming "hour," all who are in their graves will hear the voice of Christ and be raised from the dead. There is no indication here that Jesus intends to teach that an extremely long period of time will separate the resurrection of life from the resurrection of judgment.

It should be noted, however, that in a previous verse Jesus uses the word "hour" to describe the period of time during which his followers are regenerated: "Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (v. 25). Dispensationalists argue that since the "hour" mentioned in verse 25 extends throughout the entire gospel age, there is no reason why the "hour" mentioned in verse 28 could not include two resurrections separated by a thousand years.

By way of reply, it must first be said that John uses the word "hour" in more than one sense in his Gospel. To be sure, in 5:25 the word "hour" denotes the entire gospel period, during which people who are dead in sin hear the voice of Christ and become spiritually alive. A similar use of the word is found in 4:23, "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth...." But in the following passages in John's Gospel the word "hour" is used in the sense of a specific point of time which either has not yet arrived (7:30; 8:20) or which has arrived (12:23; 13:1; 16:21; 17:1). We must look carefully at each passage where John uses the word to know exactly what he means by it.

Does the word "hour" as used in 5:28 describe a period of time which could be as long as a thousand years? I think not. For first, in order to be a parallel to what is said in verse 25, the resurrection of believers and unbelievers should then be taking place throughout this thousand-year period, as is the case with the regeneration of people during the "hour" mentioned in verse 25. But, according to the theory under discussion, this is not the case; rather this theory teaches that there will be one resurrection at the beginning of the thousand years and another at the end. Of this, however, there is no hint in this passage. Further, note the words "all who are in the tombs will hear his voice." The reference would seem to be to a general resurrection of all who are in their graves; it is straining the meaning of these words to make them describe two groups (or four groups) of people who will be raised at separate times. Moreover, this passage states specifically that all these dead will hear the voice of the Son of man. The clear implication seems to be that this voice will be sounded once, not two times or four times. If the word "hour" is interpreted as standing for a period of a thousand years plus, this would imply that the voice of Jesus keeps sounding for a thousand years. Does this seem likely? What Jesus is saying is this: At a certain hour in the future my voice will be heard; at that time all who are in the grave will come forth, some to the resurrection of life, and others to the resurrection of judgment. This passage clearly teaches a general resurrection of all the dead, both of those who have done good and of those who have done evil.

Another passage where the resurrection of believers and unbelievers is mentioned together is found in Acts 24. Paul, in his defense before Felix, says: "I worship the God of our fathers ... having a hope in God which these themselves [the Jews who are accusing him] accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust" (vv. 14–15). In the Greek, as well as in the English translation, the word resurrection is in the singular (anastasin). Can two resurrections a thousand years apart properly be called a resurrection?

We turn now to Revelation 20:11–15,

(11) Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it; from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. (12) And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done. (13) And the sea gave up the

dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done. (14) Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; (15) and if any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Premillennialists, both of the historic and dispensationalist type, affirm that what is here described is a resurrection of unbelievers only. They say this on the basis of their interpretation of the vision found in verses 4 to 6 of this chapter—since, according to them, the resurrection of verses 12 and 13 is a further elaboration of the statement found in verse 5, "the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended." But, as we have seen, the premillennial interpretation of verses 4 to 6 is not the only possible one; evidence has been given for the position that 20:4–6 does not deal with a bodily resurrection of either believers or unbelievers. Premillennialists have to admit that Revelation 20:4–6 is the only clear statement in Scripture which proves, to them at least, that there will be two separate resurrections, one for believers and another for unbelievers, with a thousand years in between. But this teaching is then based on a literal interpretation of a passage from a highly symbolical book, over against the clear teaching of other passages (like John 5:28–29 and Acts 24:15) that the resurrection of believers and unbelievers will be simultaneous. George L. Murray's comment on the premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20:4–6 is very much to the point.

The anomaly confronting us here is that one can read the whole Bible without discovering an inkling of this doctrine [the doctrine of two resurrections separated by a thousand years] until he arrives at its third from the last chapter. If, on coming to that chapter, he shall give a literal interpretation to one sentence of a highly symbolical passage, he will then find it necessary to retrace his steps and interpret all the eschatological teachings of the Bible in a manner agreeable to this one sentence. The recognized rule of exegesis is to interpret an obscure passage of Scripture in the light of a clear statement. In this case, clear statements are being interpreted to agree with the literal interpretation of one sentence from a context replete with symbolism, the true meaning of which is highly debatable.

Let us now look more closely at Revelation 20:11–15. Note the reference to "the dead, great and small, standing before the throne" (v. 12). Why should these words be limited to a description of unbelievers? How can any of the dead be excluded from this group? Observe further the statement that the sea gave up the dead that were in it (v. 13). Will there then be only unbelieving dead in the sea? Note also the statement, "Death and Hades gave up the dead in them" (v. 13). Surely Hades, the realm of the dead, includes all the dead, not just the unbelieving dead.⁷

In verse 12 we read about the opening of the books. According to the latter part of verse 12, these books must contain a record of what each one has done. But there is nothing to indicate that these books contain only material for condemnation. The book of life, which is mentioned in verses 12 and 15, is commonly understood to mean the list of God's elect. Verse 15 tells us that if anyone's name was not found written in this book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. But is there any indication in the passage that none of those who stood before the great white throne had his name written in the book of life? In fact, would there be any point in saying, "If any one's name was not found written in the book of life," if the entire vision dealt only with those whose names were not written in that book?

The attempt to restrict the resurrection described in Revelation 20:11–15 to unbelievers only, therefore, is totally unconvincing. This passage clearly describes a general resurrection of all the dead: "the dead, great and small"; "the dead were judged"; "the sea gave up the dead in it"; "Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done."

Second, the Bible teaches that believers will be raised at the time of Christ's Second Coming, which time is called "the last day." Passages which teach that the resurrection of believers will occur at the time of the Second Coming include the following: 1 Thessalonians 4:16, "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first ..."; Philippians 3:20–21, "But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body ..."; and 1 Corinthians 15:23, "But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ."

When we turn to the sixth chapter of John's Gospel, however, we learn that the time when believers will be raised from the dead is called by Jesus "the last day": "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (v. 40; cf. vv. 39, 44, and 54). According to premillennialism, both historic and dispensational, the time when believers are to be raised is said to be at least a thousand years previous to the ushering in of the final state. But how can a time one thousand years before the end be "the last day"?

Third, arguments for a two-phase resurrection based on 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 1 Corinthians 15:23–24 are not conclusive. One argument based on these passages is that in neither of them are unbelievers mentioned; hence it is assumed that the resurrection of believers takes place at a different time than the resurrection of unbelievers. The reason, however, why Paul does not mention unbelievers in either of these passages is that he is dealing with the resurrection of believers only, which differs in principle from the resurrection of unbelievers. When Paul is describing the benefits Christians receive from Christ with respect to their resurrection, Paul cannot possibly include unbelievers, because the latter receive no such benefits. The fact that Paul does not mention unbelievers in either of these two texts does not at all prove that unbelievers do not arise from the dead at the same time as believers.

1 Thessalonians 4:16, which was just quoted, reads in part, "And the dead in Christ will rise first." Some premillennialists hold that the expression "will rise first" implies that believers will be raised before unbelievers. But even a cursory perusal of this passage will reveal that the contrast here is not between the resurrection of believers and unbelievers, but between the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the rapture of believers who are still living when Christ returns. Paul is telling the Thessalonians that the resurrection of deceased believers will precede the transformation and rapture of living believers at the time of the Parousia.

1 Corinthians 15:23–24 reads as follows: "But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power." The interpretation which finds a possible reference to the millennium in this passage has been discussed and answered earlier. Just as there is no conclusive evidence in this passage for a future earthly thousand-year reign, neither is there here any conclusive evidence that unbelievers will be raised a long time after believers have been raised. In this entire chapter Paul says nothing about the resurrection of unbelievers; his teachings here concern only the resurrection of believers.

We conclude that there is no Scriptural basis for the theory of a double or quadruple resurrection. The clear teaching of the Bible is that at the time of Christ's return there will be a general resurrection of both believers and unbelievers. After this general resurrection the judgment will follow.

We now take up the question of the nature of the resurrection. As is to be expected, New Testament teaching on the resurrection of the body is much more explicit and detailed than Old Testament teaching. In Chapter 9 evidence was given to show that already from the Old Testament we learn that there is a difference between the lot of the godly and that of the wicked after death. In some of the passages quoted we found an occasional hint of the possibility of the resurrection of the body. We found such a hint specifically in Psalm 16:10, "For thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol; neither wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption" (ASV).¹¹ In the light of Peter's use of this passage in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:27, 31), we may see in these words a clear prediction of the resurrection of Christ.

There are two Old Testament passages, both of them in the prophets, which explicitly speak of the resurrection of the body. The first of these is Isaiah 26:19, "Thy dead shall live, their bodies shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy!" Isaiah here contrasts the future lot of the believing dead ("thy dead") with the lot of Judah's enemies, about whom he had spoken in verse 14, "They are dead, they will not live; they are shades, they will not arise." Isaiah 26:19, therefore, speaks only about the future bodily resurrection of believers—specifically of believers among the Israelites.

Daniel 12:2, however, speaks about the resurrection of both believers and unbelievers: "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." This is the only place in the Old Testament where the expression everlasting life (chayyēy 'ōlām) occurs. Daniel here gives clear testimony to the future resurrection of the body, and to the fact that there will be a resurrection not only to eternal life but also to everlasting contempt. The same Hebrew word 'ōlām (age-long, or everlasting) is used to qualify the blessedness of the godly and the unhappiness of the ungodly. One difficulty of the passage is the use of the word many at the beginning of the text, where we would have expected the word all. Perhaps the word many is used here to refer to those who died during the "time of trouble" mentioned in the preceding verse; or perhaps many is in this instance a Hebrew equivalent to all. It is probably correct to say that the resurrection Daniel predicts is here limited to Israelites; this, however, is not surprising in view of the fact that in the prophets Israel stands for the people of God, and any message about the people of God has to be expressed in terms of Israel. In any event, we have here explicit Old Testament teaching about a resurrection of the body which will be both to everlasting life and to eternal condemnation.

Turning now to New Testament teaching about the resurrection, we find that what stands at the very center of that teaching is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures make it abundantly clear that the resurrection of Christ is the pledge and guarantee of the future resurrection of believers. All previous resurrections mentioned in the Bible were again followed by death; only the resurrection of Christ is never to be followed by death—and it is this type of resurrection to which believers look forward. Because Christ arose, believers too shall arise.

This fact is taught in a number of New Testament passages. In 1 Corinthians 15:20 we read, "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep." The word firstfruits (aparchē) means the first part of a harvest, which guarantees its eventual completion; thus Christ's resurrection is the proof and guarantee that we who are in Christ shall also arise from the dead. In Colossians 1:18 we read that Christ is "the first-born (prōtotokos) from the dead." The fact that Christ is here called the first-born implies that those who are his brothers and sisters will also arise from the dead, so that, as we learn from Romans 8:29, Christ might be "the first-born among many

brethren." In John 14:19, in fact, Christ specifically says to his disciples, "Because I live, you will live also."

From Romans 8:11 we learn not only the close connection between the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of believers, but also the fact that the resurrection of believers will be a work of the Holy Spirit: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which [who] dwells in you." In Philippians 3:20–21 Paul teaches that the resurrection bodies of believers will be similar to the resurrection body of Christ: "For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto himself (ASV). Our present body is here described as "the body of our humiliation"—humiliation because of the results of sin. We may think of such matters as suffering, pain, sickness, fatigue, and death. But in the resurrection the bodies of believers will become like the body of Christ's glory, from which all the results of sin, including death, will have been removed. At the time of the resurrection, therefore, we who are in Christ shall be completely like him, not only as regards our spirits, but even as regards our bodies.

A great number of questions could be asked and have been asked about the resurrection of the body. Is this resurrection body to be material or physical? Will there be identity between the present body and the future body? Or will the resurrection body be so different from the present body that one will not be able to speak of identity? In what ways will the resurrection body be different from the present body?

As we try to find answers to these and similar questions, we turn to 1 Corinthians 15, a chapter which contains the fullest treatment of the resurrection of the body found anywhere in the Bible. It is not easy to determine exactly what was the error combated by Paul in this chapter. Verse 12 reads, "Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" It would appear from this verse that the bodily resurrection of Christ was not denied in Corinth, but that some of the Corinthians (and only some) denied the bodily resurrection of believers. We can only surmise that this was done under the influence of Greek thought, which taught the immortality of the soul but denied the resurrection of the body. Paul replies to this error by indicating that if one believes in the resurrection of Christ, one cannot very well deny the resurrection of believers.

Paul now proceeds to combat this erroneous view by speaking first of the fact of the resurrection (vv. 12–34), then of the manner of the resurrection (vv. 35–49), and, finally, of the necessity for the resurrection and for the transformation of living believers (vv. 50–57). The fact of the resurrection of believers is proved first of all by a reference to the resurrection of Christ: "Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (vv. 12–14). One cannot, in other words, deny the resurrection of believers without denying the resurrection of Christ, since the two go together. And if one denies the resurrection of Christ, his faith is in vain—he is still in his sin.

Paul now goes on to make the point already alluded to, namely, that the resurrection of Christ is the guarantee of the resurrection of believers. In verse 20 Christ is said to be the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. In verse 21 we read that as by a man came death, by a man (that is, Jesus Christ) has come also the resurrection of the dead. And from verse 22 we learn that as in Adam all die, so also in

Christ shall all be made alive. In this last passage the first all refers to all who are in Adam—that is, all men. The second all, however, refers to all who are in Christ—that is, all believers. Paul does not speak in this passage about the resurrection of unbelievers; his only concern here is with the resurrection of believers. In these verses, therefore, he makes the point that because Christ arose, all those who are in Christ shall arise with him. This resurrection of believers is, in fact, a necessary aspect of Christ's mediatorial work, for "the last enemy to be destroyed is death" (v. 26).

In verse 35 Paul begins to discuss the manner of the resurrection. He first adduces the figure of the seed: "But some one will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body" (vv. 35–38). We must not press these verses so far as to suggest that they teach that our present bodies contain a kind of germ or seed of the resurrection body, which seed remains intact after the body dies and later forms the basis for the resurrection body. Such an idea is purely speculative. Paul's point is simply this: You who doubt the possibility of a physical resurrection, consider the marvel of the sowing of seed. You sow a grain of wheat into the ground; the grain now dies as a grain, but in time God will make a new plant come out of the ground where the grain was sown. To such a grain God gives a "body" as he has chosen to do, and to each kind of grain or seed its own particular "body." If God is able to do this with seed, why can he not also do this with the human body?

By means of this illustration Paul is making three points: First, just as the new plant will not appear unless the seed dies as a seed, so the resurrection body will not appear unless the body in its present form dies. Second, just as one cannot tell from the appearance of the seed what the future plant will look like, so one cannot tell by observing the present body exactly what the resurrection body will be like. Third, just as there is continuity between the seed and the plant, so there will be continuity between the present body and the resurrection body.

The figure of sowing and reaping is continued in verses 42–44, where Paul draws some striking contrasts between the present body and the resurrection body: "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It [the body] is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (ASV). The reference to sowing ("it is sown") is probably a figurative description of burial, since burying a body bears some similarity to the sowing of a seed into the ground. It should be remembered, however, that in each case the description of the body in the first half of the comparison applies to the entire time of the body's present existence, and not just to its condition at the time of burial.

The first of these four contrasts is between corruption and incorruption. Our present bodies, so says Paul, are bodies of corruption (phthora); the seeds of disease and death are in them, so that it is only a question of time until these bodies die. But our bodies shall be raised in incorruption (aphtharsia). All liability to disease shall then be gone. No longer shall we then be on our way to certain death, as we are now, but we shall then enjoy an incorruptible kind of existence.

The second contrast is between dishonor (atimia) and glory (doxa). We try to honor the dead at the time of burial by dressing them in their best clothes, providing an attractive casket, and surrounding the casket with flowers, but actually burial involves great dishonor. What could be more dishonorable for a body than to be lowered into a grave? The bodies of believers, however, shall be raised in glory—not

just an external kind of glory, but a glory which will transform the person from within. From Philippians 3:21 we have learned that the resurrection body will be like the glorified body of Christ—radiant, shining, perhaps even dazzling. We shall not really know what this glory is like until we ourselves shall see it and experience it.

The third contrast is between weakness (*astheneia*) and power (*dynamis*). After a few hours of work in this present body, we soon become tired and need rest. In whatever we attempt to do we are always conscious of our weakness, of our human limitations. As death approaches, in fact, the body becomes totally helpless. But at the time of the resurrection this body will be raised in power. Exactly how that power will reveal itself, we can only guess; we shall know it when we see it. It would appear that the weaknesses which now hinder us in our service of the Lord will then no longer be present.

With the fourth contrast we must spend a little more time. This is the one between a natural body (*sōma psychikon*) and a spiritual body (*sōma pneumatikon*). One of the difficulties here is that the expression "a spiritual body" has led many to think that the resurrection body will be a nonphysical one—spiritual is then thought to be in contrast with physical.

That this is not so can be easily shown. The resurrection body of the believer, we have seen, will be like the resurrection body of Christ. But Christ's resurrection body was certainly a physical one; he could be touched (John 20:17, 27) and he could eat food (Luke 24:38–43). Further, the word spiritual (*pneumatikos*) does not describe that which is nonmaterial or nonphysical. Note how Paul uses the same contrast in the same epistle, chapter 2:14–15: "Now the natural (*psychikos*) man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged. But he that is spiritual (*pneumatikos*) judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of no man" (ASV). Here the same two Greek words, *psychikos* and *pneumatikos*, are used as in 15:44. But spiritual (*pneumatikos*) here does not mean nonphysical. Rather, it means someone who is guided by the Holy Spirit, at least in principle, in distinction from someone who is guided only by his natural impulses. In similar fashion, the natural body described in 15:44 is one which is part of this present, sin-cursed existence; but the spiritual body of the resurrection is one which will be totally, not just partially, dominated and directed by the Holy Spirit.

Man in his present body, related to the first Adam, is *psychikos*, natural, belonging to this present age, and therefore easily tempted to do wrong. To be sure, the person who is in Christ is now enabled to resist temptation, to say no to the devil, and to live a new, obedient life. But our obedience in this present life remains imperfect; we realize that we fall far short of the ideal, and must still daily confess our sins. Our future existence, however, will be an existence completely and totally ruled by the Holy Spirit, so that we shall be forever done with sin. Therefore the body of the resurrection is called a spiritual body. Geerhardus Vos is correct when he insists that we ought to capitalize the word spiritual in this verse, so as to make clear that the verse describes the state in which the Holy Spirit rules the body.

If the resurrection body were nonmaterial or nonphysical, the devil would have won a great victory, since God would then have been compelled to change human beings with physical bodies such as he had created into creatures of a different sort, without physical bodies (like the angels). Then it would indeed seem that matter had become intrinsically evil so that it had to be banished. And then, in a sense, the Greek philosophers would have been proved right. But matter is not evil; it is part of God's good creation. Therefore the goal of God's redemption is the resurrection of the physical body, and the

creation of a new earth on which his redeemed people can live and serve God forever with glorified bodies. Thus the universe will not be destroyed but renewed, and God will win the victory.

In 1 Corinthians 15:50–57 Paul takes up the question of the necessity for the resurrection of the body. When Paul says in verse 50, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God," he is not trying to say that the resurrection body will not be physical, but rather that "man as he now is, a frail, perishable creature, cannot have a place in God's glorious, heavenly kingdom." He goes on to say, "nor does the perishable (phthora) inherit the imperishable (aphtharsia)" (v. 50). What Paul is saying here is that it is impossible for us in our present state of being, in our present bodies, weak and perishable as they are, to inherit the full blessings of the life to come. There must be a change.

This being the case, the change must involve not only those believers who have died by the time Christ returns, but also those believers who are then still alive. Therefore Paul goes on to say, in verses 51–52, "Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed." The change which is necessary, from a perishable body to an imperishable one, will be required for both the living and the dead. The glorification of those believers who are still living when Christ comes will take place in a moment. At the time of Christ's return, in other words, both the resurrection of the dead and the transformation of the living will take place in quick succession. From 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 we learn that the rapture of believers—their being caught up to meet the Lord in the air—will take place immediately afterwards.

Paul now expresses in a positive way what he had expressed negatively in verse 50: "For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality" (v. 53). Paul has thus shown that both the resurrection of deceased believers and the transformation of living believers are absolutely necessary if believers are to enjoy the glories of the future life. Only after this has happened will the final victory over death have taken place: "When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory' " (v. 54).

Earlier the question was raised whether there will be continuity between the present body and the resurrection body. On the basis of the Scriptural givens, it must be said that there will be both continuity and difference. There must be continuity, for otherwise there would be little point in speaking about a resurrection at all. The calling into existence of a completely new set of people totally different from the present inhabitants of the earth would not be a resurrection. When Paul says that the dead will be raised (1 Cor. 15:52) and that we who are alive shall be changed (v. 52), surely he means that there will be a continuity of some sort between these two stages of existence. As a matter of fact, the very language of verse 53 implies and even demands continuity. "For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality" [*italics mine*]. We remember, too, what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, after he has described the resurrection of believers and subsequent rapture of the church, "And so we shall always be with the Lord." Those who shall always be with the Lord after their resurrection or transformation will not be creatures other than ourselves, but we.

Yet, though there will be continuity, there will also be difference. We have already looked at passages which describe these differences, particularly 1 Corinthians 15. We note now two other texts which mention specific differences between the present body and the resurrection body. According to

Matthew 22:30 (and the parallel passages, Mark 12:25 and Luke 20:35) Jesus taught that in the life to come there will be no marriage: "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven." The similarity to angels, we may presume, applies only to the point being made, not to the absence of physical bodies. Jesus' teaching here does not necessarily imply that there will be no sex differences in the life to come. What we do learn, however, is that the institution of marriage will no longer be in existence, since there will be no need to bring new children into the world.

A second passage which suggests a difference is found in 1 Corinthians 6:13, " 'Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food'—and God will destroy both one and the other." The word here rendered "destroy," *katargeō*, often means to abolish, to do away with, or to bring to an end. It would seem that, according to this passage, the digestive functions of the body will no longer be necessary in the life to come.

We must confess, however, that the Bible tells us very little about the exact nature of the resurrection body. We are given a few hints, but a great deal remains unsaid. In fact, it is interesting to observe that much of what the Bible says about that future existence is in terms of negations: absence of corruption, weakness, and dishonor; absence of death; absence of tears, mourning, crying, or pain (1 Cor. 15:42–43; Rev. 21:4). We know something of what we shall not experience, but we know little of what we shall experience. All we do know is that it shall be wonderful, beyond our highest imaginings. Words which Paul spoke in another connection are probably applicable here: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9, KJ).²⁰

Source: The Bible and the Future (pp. 239–252). by Anthony A. Hoekema. Redeemer Church of Piketon, Ohio does not necessarily agree with all the doctrinal views of the authors it publishes.

**Redeemer Church of Piketon, Ohio
768 State Route 220
Piketon, Ohio 45661
www.RedeemerPiketon.org**