

STAND FIRM IN THE RESURRECTION HOPE (2)

PMW 2025-034 by Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.

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This is the second in my series discussing 1 Corinthians 15 as it regards the resurrection of the dead. Having thoroughly rebuked the heretical party at Corinth, Paul urges them (and all Christians) to “stand firm. Let nothing move you” (1 Cor. 15:58) from this resurrection hope, as he comes to the grand finale of his letter. This chapter happens to be the Achilles Heel (one among many!) of hyper-preterism and its assault on historic Christianity.

I will be focusing on key verses in Paul’s great “Resurrection Chapter,” though not exegeting the entirety of this lengthy chapter. And I will be concerned (as Paul was) with the believer’s resurrection rather than the unbeliever’s, though Paul held to the resurrection of both (Acts 23:6; 24:15), as did his Lord (John 5:25–29).

An Important Opening Issue

One area of the hyper-preterist’s debate with historic Christian theology has to do with the nature or composition of the resurrection body. That is, whether it will be material or spiritual, whether tangible or ethereal. And I will get to that issue at the appropriate time.

The first issue regarding the resurrection that I will deal with, though, will be an often overlooked but more basic and important one. I will focus on the foundational question underlying the issue before us. And that question is; at the resurrection, will God be creating an altogether new body for the believer that is not the one in which he lived during his earthly sojourn? Or will God be reconstituting and reviving the flesh-and-bones body in which the believer actually dwelled while on earth—or on the moon or Mars, or wherever he might be at the time of his death (depending on Elon Musk’s success back in the 21st century [I’m looking ahead now, so that I can look back]), transforming it into an imperishable material body made suitable for eternity? [1]

Thus, we have before us this fundamental question: Is the divine work of resurrection a creative action, or is it a transformative one? Then, as a consequence, is the resurrection body a new and different body, or is it a restored and improved one? That is, will the resurrection be more like Pharisaic Judaism’s belief in the material resurrection of the flesh? Or will it be more like the Gnostic view that dismisses the material, preferring the spiritual? So, as the famed liberal scholar James D. G. Dunn expressed the issue at debate: “The real debate is whether Paul conceived of the resurrection body in terms of a reconstitution of the flesh.”

Historically, the Christian view (as seen in the historic ecumenical creeds, which summarize the biblical doctrine) has followed the path of the first-century mainline

Jewish belief. This is despite the efforts of Valentinus (ca. 100–180) and Origen (ca. 185–253) to promote a spiritual-body view. This spiritual-body doctrine has long lain in the dustbin of history until resurrected (!) by modern liberalism, such as promoted by Otto Pfleiderer (1877) and Ernst Teschmann (1896).

The Internal Issues Involved

According to the spiritual-body advocates, Paul held that our resurrection will liberate us from the present fleshly body, which has characterized us as humans from the beginning (Gen. 2:7). Indeed, on this view the resurrection also frees us from our material earthly existence so that we can dwell as spirits in heaven forever.

However, Paul teaches something quite different—as does that darn, confounded historic Christianity! Here in 1 Corinthians 15, he teaches that our resurrection will restore our earthly material bodies to us. But it will do so while simultaneously liberating us from the power of death and freeing our bodies from the prospect of dishonor, weakness, and perishability (vv. 42–43). And consequent upon this, the renewed, transformed creation-order will become our eternal home (Rom. 8:21–22; 2 Pet. 3:10–13).

Consequently, this whole debate involves matters far beyond what most laymen traditionally believe regarding “eschatology” (i.e., the very last things of history). Biblical eschatology actually begins before the beginning! For God has chosen us before the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:34; Eph. 1:4; Rev. 13:8; 17:8) and initiated and began guiding our eschatological salvation immediately upon Adam’s fall into sin (Gen. 3:15). Therefore, Paul’s eschatological resurrection impacts Christology and anthropology, as well as eschatology proper.

Conclusion

As I continue this series, I will flesh out (no pun intended) Paul’s physical resurrection doctrine more fully. I will demonstrate that Paul does not mean what the hyper-preterists and Gnostics think he means by our receiving a “*spiritual body*” (1 Cor. 15:44) and of Christ’s becoming “*a life-giving spirit*” (v. 45). Nor do they properly understand what he means when he says, “*Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*” (v. 50).

Notes

1. For whether it is entirely too difficult for Almighty God, Maker of Heaven and Earth, to remake the wasted-away body of a person arising from the dead, see Robert L. Dabney’s study of the matter, found at: PMW 2025-020 and PMW 2025-021. Or go to: <https://postmillennialworldview.com/?s=dabney&submit=Search>

Thus, our resurrection follows the pattern of Job’s expectation: “*I know that my Redeemer lives, / And at the last He will take His stand on the earth. / Even after my skin is destroyed, / Yet from my flesh I shall see God; / Whom I shall behold, /*

And whom my eyes will see and not another.” (Job 19:25–27) I really don’t think Job was kidding. He was in no joking mood due to his various woes.

Two thoughts on:

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- **Alvin Plummer** May 2, 2025 at 7:04 am

I should note at the onset that I substantially agree with you, Dr. Gentry, and the traditional Christian/Reformed position.

I do have a minor quibble, though.

I suggest a focus on the continuity of body structure/patterns and the use of material per se in our resurrected body, instead of the exact material or atoms present in our body at the time of death.

Roughly 98% of our body’s atoms are replaced each year. (Not replaced include structures like the neurons and the lens of our eye.) And at one time, we were just a tiny number of cells in our mother’s womb.

Physical continuity matters: Jesus Christ used the material in His (non-decaying!) corpse as the basis of His resurrected body.

I am unsure how much it matters to us sinners, though, who decay (and/or dissolve in the sea, or are burnt to ashes, or are digested by animals).

While I am unsure, God knows, so I am satisfied that we will have a physical resurrected body. Perhaps the exact atoms will be different, but 98% of my atoms are different from a year ago, so I am not so worried about that.

- **Kenneth Gentry** May 5, 2025 at 2:28 pm

I agree with you. It is not the same exact atoms. See the article by Robert L. Dabney that I published a few months ago on this very topic. “Dabney on the Resurrection Body” (1,3). <https://postmillennialworldview.com/?s=dabney&submit=Search>