

# We Will All Be Changed

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To many students of Paul, the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of the first letter to the Corinthian church is the most revealing of all of Paul's writings. In fact, this chapter was the basis of this writer's thesis for a graduate degree from Candler School of Theology at Emory University. In terms of theology, terminology, and imagery, the ore is in abundance in this text, as nuggets of gold packed in a papyrus scroll waiting to be pulled out and considered for the wonder and joy they bring the one viewing them. My thesis was 192 pages long; this study will be significantly shortened.

Within this text is Paul's most extensive development of what has been called his "Adam Christology," wherein Jesus, a descendent of the first Adam, is identified as the re-visitation of the original Adam. Here Jesus is called "the last Adam" (v 45), and "the second Adam" (v 47). The nature of present creation is identified as existence **in Adam**, (v 22) and all men who are his descendents are identified with him as the representative head of the human race. A new existence if humanity has been created by the resurrection of Jesus, which Paul calls existence **in Christ**, (v 22), and all those who have undergone the regeneration of their spirit through conversion to Christ are identified with him as the representative head of the new humanity he brought into existence by his resurrection.

There is also some detail as to the nature of **the resurrection of the saints at the second coming** of Christ (vv 23-24, 42-44, 49, 51-54). Of special interest to the believer is Paul's discussion of the nature of the resurrected body (vv 42-44, 49, 51-54). Other themes and motifs are to be found here, but only one more will be mentioned, that is the motif of **the death of death** in v 54. The curse of death applicable to Adam and his offspring will no longer be amenable to those who are

in Christ, in that they have changed their identity from those who belong to the existence of Adam to those who belong to new existence in Christ. Where sin and death has been the defining characteristics of the existence of Adamic man, belief, obedience to the will of God, and eternal life are the defining characteristics of the existence of the believer in Christ.

## The Curse

We begin our study of this discourse by addressing the curse of death, which entered the world with the disbelief and disobedience of the first Adam:

*For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22For as **in Adam all die**, so **in Christ all will be made alive**. 23But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, **when he comes**, those who belong to him; 24then the end will come, (1 Cor 15:21-24).*

In Romans 5:12, Paul wrote, "sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned." Two of the apostolic fathers interpreted the sin of Adam and Eve as imputed to all men, making all offspring of Adam born in sin. Origen (185 to 232 AD) conceived the idea of imputed (transferred) sin and Augustine (354-430 AD) worked out the particulars by insisting that the sexual union of the husband and wife was an act of lust of the flesh and all offspring of the union are conceived in sin; Adam and Eve's firstborn was conceived in sin as a result of the "original sin" of Adam and Eve. From Rom 5:12, we are clearly told, "death spread to all men because all men sinned;" thus, every man is responsible for the consequences of his own choices. The doctrine of "original sin" owes its origin to a second century theologian, not the apostle Paul.

More importantly, Paul says that "in Adam" all die because of the curse of sin (Gen 2:15-17; 3:19). The curse of death, however, lost its power in the death of Jesus who was sinless. It is the soul that sins that shall die (Deut 30:15-20; Ezek 18:20), thus the satanic power of death could not claim Jesus. His resurrection from death destroyed

its power over him; thus “in Christ,” death has no power, for him or for those who are “in Christ.” How this miracle of the full re-creation of man was to occur is revealed here by Paul: the fulfillment of the promise of eternal life would begin with the renewal of the spirit of the believer in this life, then the renewal of the body in the resurrection of the saints at the second coming of Christ.

### A Spiritual Body

Paul next takes up the subject of the nature of the resurrected bodies the saints will receive at the second coming of Christ.

*The body that is sown is perishable, it is **raised imperishable**; 43it is sown in dishonor, it is **raised in glory**; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44it is sown a natural body, it is **raised a spiritual body**. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 45So it is written: "**The first man Adam became a living being;**" the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. 46The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. 47**The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven.** 48As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. 49And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven(1 Cor 15:42-49).*

Paul here pulls heavily from the creation story of Gen 1:26 and 2:7 (cf. 1 Cor 15:47) in his discussion of the origins of each Adam. He then informs us that at the time of the resurrection of the saints, we will become as the man from heaven (v 49). We learn from his first letter that John has received the same insights from God:

*Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been made known what we will be. We know that when he appears, we will be like him, because we will see him just as he is (1 John 3:2).*

The human body, the flesh of man, will return to the earth from whence it came (Gen 3:19). It is buried perishable or corruptible, in dishonor, in weakness, a natural body, but at the second coming of Christ it will be raised imperishable or incorruptible, raised in glory,

raised in power, it is sown a natural body (*soma psuchikon*) and will become a spiritual body (*soma pneumatikon*).

Here we are given a look behind the curtain at what will occur when the spirit is reunited with the new body; one that has become eternal as the spirit is eternal. This body will be the same as the body of Jesus (1 John 3:2). From what can be learned from the Gospels concerning Jesus' resurrected form; we see that his physical appearance was the same as before his crucifixion. He was recognized by Mary Magdalene and the other women who went to the tomb with her (Luke 24:1-12; John 20:10-18). He yet bore the imprint of the nails in his hands and feet, and the scar from the open wound to his side (John 20:20, 25-27).

He walked with two disciples in route to a village called Emmaus without being recognized (Luke 24:13-35). Was it that their eyes were kept from seeing his face and their ears from recognizing his voice? Or was he able to appear differently? When they did recognize him, he disappeared out of their sight; did he dematerialize, as appears to be the case with his appearances to the eleven disciples in the upper room? He appeared in their midst, then disappeared from their midst (John 20:19, 26).

Then there's the appearance of Jesus to Saul of Tarsus. In Acts 9, 22, 26, the risen Jesus appeared as a being of light. That Paul's concept of Jesus was based on the appearance of Jesus to him in a manifestation of brilliant light rather than the way he appeared prior to his resurrection is clear from 2 Cor 5:16-17, where Paul says:

*So from now on we regard no one according to the flesh (kata sarka). Though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh (kata sarka), we do so no longer. 17Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

What did he mean by, "though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we do so no longer?" The title Paul used to describe the Jesus he saw on the road to Damascus was "the Son of God" (Acts 9:20), a title not used for Jesus in Acts, with exception of

Paul. The Christological title Paul uses most to identify Jesus is "Lord" (*kurios*), the title used for God in the Greek Septuagint to translate the Hebrew name for God, *YHWH*; which no Jew would utter. What Paul believed about Jesus' form following his resurrection is found in the following verse, in reference to, "new creation." Jesus was changed from his earthly form, even though he appeared to those who knew him before as the rabbi from Nazareth was now changed into the firstfruit of the new creation. Now he was a being whose face shone like the sun and his clothes white as the light (Matt 17:2), whose clothes became as bright as a flash of lightening (Luke 9:29), or whose clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them (Mk 9:3), as he appeared in the transfiguration (Matt 17:1-3; Mk 9:2-4; Luke 9:28-32). There are also the otherworldly beings who appeared to the disciples at the resurrection: the two in Matt 28:2-3, who appeared like lightening, whose garments were white as snow, or the two men in Mark 16:5, in white robes, or Luke 24:4, two men in garments that gleamed like lightening.

There is also the vision Stephen received of Jesus before he was stoned to death, as he was waiting to die he, "looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God," and declared, "Look, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God," (Acts 7:55-56). How do we interpret this? Why did he say he saw, "the Son of Man?" Was he referring to the Son of Man figure of Daniel 7, or did he see Jesus as he often spoke of himself in circumlocution, as a *ben Adam*, a son of man, "one of us?" The words of John must guard us from dogmatic assertions in this matter, "it has not yet been made known what we will be; we know that when he appears, we will be like him, because we will see him just as he is," (1 John 3:2). What is the meaning of "just as he is?" Whatever this means, it is clear from John that, "we shall be like him," (1 John 3:2). Paul identifies Jesus as "the man from heaven," whose body was like the body of Adam "a natural body (*soma psuchikon*)" but was now "a spiritual body," (*soma pneumatikos*), (1 Cor 15:40, 42-45). As Jesus' body was sown a perishable body, it was raised an imperishable body, as it was sown in dishonor, it was raised in glory; as it was sown in weakness, it was

raised in power; as it was sown in a natural body, it was raised a spiritual body. Then Paul informs his readers,

*As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. 49And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven, (1 Cor 15:42-49).*

The word of verse 49 that jumps off the page in importance is the Greek *kathos*, meaning, “just as,” or “in the same manner.” Paul is saying that the faithful disciple of Jesus, even though his body is now subject to the curse of Adam and will be sown as an earthly body, it will be raised “just as” or “in the same manner as” the body of Jesus. It will be raised, “a spiritual body,” just as Jesus’ body; a body of new creation, with Jesus as the firstfruit of new creation existence, and he is the example of what the spiritual body of the new creation of God will be. Robin Scroggs, in his highly respected book on Adam Christology, comments on the significance of all this for Paul:

The reason for the Apostle’s stress on Christ’s resurrection is based . . . on his belief that the resurrection marks the beginning of the humanity of the Last Adam. Christ has become the model and means of the resurrection of the Christian. **In his body of glory Christ is true humanity**, the realization of that existence the Christian will himself have one day. Christ is also the mediator of that nature (Scroggs, *The Last Adam*, p 92).

### Behold, I Tell You a Mystery

*I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom/reign of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51Behold, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – 52in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, **the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.** 53For the perishable must **clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.** 54When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is*

written will come true: "*Death has been swallowed up in victory* (1 Cor 15:50-54).

The word "mystery" is a revealing word. It is taken from the Greek word "*musterion*," which can mean a secret, something hidden or not known, or it can be the revelation of a secret, or can mean something of wonder or something that causes one to wonder. This word is found often in the letters of Paul, where he uses it as it is used in the apocryphal wisdom literature of Hellenistic Judaism. Paul is making known something that has been hidden. It has not been revealed before so there's no need to look for it in the ancient texts of the prophets of Israel. The resurrection of the saints will be a grand event associated with the second coming of Christ. He prefaces the description of these events with the words, "We will be changed," (*allasso* - to change, to alter, to transform). Something is going to be changed, altered, or transformed, and it will be ushered in with suddenness. In "a flash" (*atomeo* - at an instant, a moment), in the twinkling of an eye (*ripe* - a wink or twinkle), at the last trumpet." This last expression has a history. This trumpet (*salpigx*) is not a specific kind of horn as much as a sound. It can be the sounding of the *shofar*, as the blasting of a mature ram's horn to introduce the coming of the Sabbath, a feast day, the moment of sacrifice, or something similar. Or it could be the blasting of the trumpet of the watchman as in Ezek 33:3, 5, 6. When that sound is heard, the hour has come, the time is at hand, it is happening!

The dead (*nekpos* - corpse) will be raised imperishable (*aphthartoi* - not corrupted). That which is dead (the body) will not be as it is, but as "he" is. "When he appears," writes John, "we will be like him, because we will see him just as he is," (1 John 3:2). That which has become corrupted will put on incorruption, which means that the corruptible body that experienced death will not be restored, it "will be changed" (*allasso* - to alter or transform); changed into "a spiritual body" just as the body of Christ.

Robin Scroggs argues that Paul's use of the words *metamorphoo* (transformed) and *anakainosis* (renewal) conveys an eschatological meaning. Commenting on 2 Cor 4:16, he says,

“Though our outer humanity [*anthropos*] is wasting away, our inner humanity is being renewed every day,” (translation mine). Col 3:10 is similar. The new humanity *is* being renewed (again *anakainoo*) in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In all of these passages *anakainoo* implies that Paul is thinking of eschatological existence as a new creation. Christ as Last Adam is the first fruits of the new creation. Although the Christian still lives in ‘this world’ in his outer being, his inner life is made new by the Spirit, according to the nature of the resurrected Christ, who is the true image of God and thus the true reality of man (Robin Scroggs, *The Last Adam*, p 110).

The events that are to be fulfilled in the resurrection by the saints at the return of Christ fall under the heading of “eschatology,” in NT studies. This word derives from the Greek word *eschaton* meaning, “the end of something,” or more specifically the events of the endtime or the “end of time.” Paul’s two letters to the church in Thessalonica address issues of eschatology or the endtime, where he addresses the manner of the second coming of Christ. Here in 1 Cor 15, Paul is addressing something more, he is addressing the hope of eternal life for those who believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, as Jesus gave interpretation to the title, and that he came into the world of man to deliver man from his enslavement to sin and the destruction of the human race.

How this was done is the most essential message of the New Testament Scriptures. The nature that deliverance has taken is the effect or new creation of the existence of those who believe. The return of Christ and the resurrection of the saints is described in different ways in the NT, but the portrayal of it as a conquest of the satanic forces that held mankind in slavery is the one Paul uses in his writings. Paul believes that God has undertaken a restoration of the human race.

### The Glory That Shall Be Revealed

In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul tells them that the suffering the believer experiences in this life is of little consequence compared to the glory to be revealed in the believer at the

resurrection of the saints, when they are revealed as “the sons of God.”

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with **the glory which shall be revealed in us.** 19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God (Rom 8:18-19).*

Concerning the nature of eschatological existence and the concept of glory to be received by those in Christ, Robin Scroggs comments:

Perhaps the most common characteristic applied to the new man, however, is that of ‘glory,’ *doxa*. The body of the resurrection is raised in glory (I Cor 15:43). The man in Christ is being changed from glory into glory (II Cor 3:18). And ‘eternal weight of glory,’ *aionion bapros doxes*, awaits man in the new age (II Cor 4:17). The redeemed will appear with Christ in glory (Col 3:4). God has prepared the redeemed for glory (Rom 9:23; 2:10), (Scroggs, *The Last Adam*, p 64).

It is a fact that the resurrection appearances of Jesus show him to be of a different nature, even though he continues to be called a man, as in Paul’s reference to him as “the man from heaven,” (1 Cor 15:49), as well as the references to his glory: Matt 16:27; 24:30; 25:31; Luke 24:26; John 17:24; 1 Cor 2:8; 2 Cor 4:6; Col 3:4; 1 Tim 3:16; 2 Tim 2:10; Heb 1:1-4; James 2:1; 1 Peter 1:11; 4:13; 5:10; 2 Peter 1:3; 1:17; Jude 1:24.

The glory to be revealed in the sons of God is a reoccurring motif in his letters, as seen in the following texts:

*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice **in hope of the glory of God** (Rom 5:1-2).*

*But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages **for our glory**, 8 which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified **the Lord of glory**. 9 But as it is written: “Eye has not seen,*

*nor ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him," (1 Cor 2:7-9).*

*So also is the resurrection of the dead; the body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 43 It is sown in dishonor; **it is raised in glory** (1 Cor 15:42-43).*

*Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 18 But we all, with unveiled face, **beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord**, are being **transformed into the same image** from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor 3:17-18).*

*But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel **of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God**, should shine on them. 5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. 6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts **to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ** (2 Cor 4:3-6).*

*He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. 15 **He is the image of the invisible God**, the firstborn over all creation (Col 1:13-15).*

*I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, 26 the mystery, which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to his saints. 27 To them God willed to make known **what are the riches of the glory of this mystery** among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, **the hope of glory**. 28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ Jesus (Col 1:27-28).*

*If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life*

*is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then **you also will appear with him in glory** (Col 3:1-4).*

*Therefore we do not lose heart; even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and **eternal weight of glory**, 18 while we do not look at the things, which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things, which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal (Col 4:16-18).*

The revealed mystery or story Paul tells must be believed and acted upon by the believer - believe that it is so, and be conformed to and transformed by that belief. As one can act out of his disbelief and become one with his disbelief, so also can one act out of his belief and become one with his belief. Adam stands as the representative head of the race of man condemned by disbelief. Through reenactment of Adam's story; specifically, his disbelief, man identifies himself with Adam and his mortality.

Through reenactment of Christ's story; specifically his belief and obedience (Matt 26:39), one identifies himself with Christ and receives a foretaste of eternal life now through renewal of the spirit, and the promise of the re-creation of the body and its union with the spirit in the resurrection, when man, the being created in the image of God, becomes fully restored as he was created to be.

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