

Paul's Belief in a Bodily Resurrection

An argument against the contention that Jesus rose spiritually in Paul's thought.

by Chris Price (July 21, 2003)

Many skeptics have argued that the earliest Christians believed in a solely spiritual resurrection of Jesus and, eventually, his followers. Only later, this theory maintains, did the Christian idea of the spiritual resurrection evolve into a belief in a physical resurrection. Exhibit A for such theorists, is Paul and his purported belief in a solely spiritual resurrection of Jesus and Christians. Skeptics who have argued this position include Richard Carrier and David Friedman.

[Does 1 Corinthians Chapter 15 Teach a Physical or a Spiritual Resurrection?](#)

[Could the Original Gospel Have Been of a Spiritual Rather Than a Physical Resurrection?](#)

However, the idea that Paul believed in a spiritual resurrection and not a physical one has rightly been rejected by the majority of scholars. Even some skeptics have rejected it. See Peter Kirby's chapter on the [Testimony of Paul](#).

Paul's self-identified Jewishness precludes such a conclusion. The notion that Christianity grew out of a Jewish belief in a spiritual resurrection that evolved into a belief in a bodily resurrection as Christianity became more influenced by Hellenism is a very unlikely prospect. Additionally, the language Paul uses to describe the resurrection--most notably "soma"--emphasizes the physical nature of the resurrected person. Finally, Paul's belief that Christians immediately went to be with Jesus upon their death, but still awaited a "resurrection" demonstrates that the resurrection being discussed was a physical one.

Before examining these arguments further, a point of clarification is in order. By physical resurrection I merely mean that there is some level of continuity between the body of Jesus or the dead Christian and their respective new body. I do not address how much continuity there was between old or new, or whether the new body was made out of the same stuff as the old. I will use the terms simply: a physical resurrection results in the original body missing from the grave, a spiritual resurrection has no affect on the original body.

I. Paul's Jewish Background

That Christianity originated in a Jewish context is beyond dispute. Early Christians were Jews and used Jewish scripture as their own. Friedman and Carrier completely but intentionally ignore this background and argue that because Christianity changed some parts of Judaism, that no part of Jewish belief is informative as to Christian belief. This assertion lacks merit. Indeed, it appear to be disingenuous (Carrier, for example, is quite happy to use Paul's supposed Hellenistic background to argue against a physical resurrection). There is much of Christianity that only makes sense in a Jewish context, to ignore this context altogether on so central an issue (to Christianity and to Second Temple Judaism) can only arise from fear of where such investigation would lead. In any event, the little regard that Carrier and Friedman exhibit for Paul's Jewish background is in direct contravention of the importance Paul clearly places on it. Paul is a "Hebrew of Hebrews", of the tribe of Benjamin, as to the law blameless. But Paul does more than identify his Jewishness, it pervades his letters, affects his theology, and is apparent to any informed reader. Paul time and again relies on Jewish scripture. He believes in the Prophets, in Abraham, in Adam. He counts time by reference to Jewish holidays.

Carrier again attempts to confuse the issue by arguing that, even if Paul was a Jew, only the Pharisees believed in a bodily resurrection. The Sadducees and Essenes did not. This argument too appears disingenuous. Not only was the Pharisaic view of resurrection shared by the majority of Jews, but the Sadducees certainly did not believe in a spiritual resurrection. In fact, they believed in no resurrection or life after death at all. But, most important of all, Paul readily admits that he was "as to the law, a Pharisee" (Phil. 3:5). Moreover, except for the timing of Jesus' resurrection, Paul sounds like a Pharisee when he discusses the resurrection, eschatology, the mission to the Jews, and belief in his belief in angels (something else the Essenes denied). This belief in the resurrection was distinct in the first century.

In Greco-Roman thought generally, the body was thought to be the prison of the soul. Evil matter is temporal and the spirit is eternal. In Gnostic religious systems, moreover, the believer required special revelation knowledge to ascend through the dangerous celestial spheres to escape from the material universe. The god of spirits--sought by Gnostics--was not interested in the revival of dead bodies. According to their religious system, the material universe was composed of evil matter, which is contrasted to the spiritual realm. Greeks longed to be free from the confines of the body. While they did believe in the survival of the human soul after death, the notion that the body would be reunited with the soul in a physical resuscitation was foreign to their conceptual world.

The Jewish people, however, believed that God created the world. Our physical world is God's creation, and it is good. The Pharisees, in contrast to the Greco-Roman religious beliefs, vigorously affirmed the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees stressed a literal resurrection of the physical body, which would be reunited with the spirit of an individual. Their worldview embraced a future restoration of God's original design for his world. The Pharisees envisioned a time of redemption in which God would realign the physical creation with the ethereal realm.

Brad H. Young, *Paul, The Jewish Theologian*, at 123.

Although--as discussed above--there were Jewish groups who disagreed with the Pharisees, such as the Sadducees, the basis for their disagreement was very different than that with the Greeks. The Sadducees denied that there was any life after death whatsoever for humans. The disagreement between the two sects was sharp. Pharisaic belief in the resurrection was paramount and nonnegotiable. They went so far as to teach: "The one who says the resurrection of the dead is not taught in the Torah, has no place in the world to come." (m. Sanh. 10:1).

By aligning himself with a Pharisaic background, Paul provides us with an important insight into the meaning he attaches to the term: resurrection. That is, it is a physical resurrection of the body.

II. The Term "Soma" Emphasizes the Physical

When speaking of the resurrection of Jesus or believers, Paul refers to the resurrection of the "soma." Soma is Greek for "body" and it carries the same emphasis on physicality as does its English equivalent. "The soma denotes the physical body, roughly synonymous with flesh in the neutral sense. It forms that part of man in and through which he lives acts in the world. It becomes the base of operations for sin in the unbeliever, for the Holy Spirit in the believer. Barring prior occurrence in the Parousia, the soma will die. That is the lingering effect of sin even in the believer. But it will also be resurrected. That is its ultimate end, a major proof of its worthy and necessity to the wholeness of human being, and the reason for its sanctification now." Robert H. Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology*, at 50.

A. Paul's Use of Soma Outside the Resurrection

A review of Paul's view reinforces the point made above--that it carries with it an emphasis on the physical part of humans.

1Co 5:3 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present.

Paul's "soma" is not present. That is, his body is not present, even though his "spirit" is with the Corinthians. The focus of the term is a physical absence.

"The meaning of absent in body is clear enough: Paul's physical body is not in Corinth but in some other place. But what does present in spirit mean? In Paul's usage, spirit more often than not refers to the Spirit of God... but it is more probable, in view of the contrast with body, that Paul is using the word in a quite popular sense, that is, psychologically rather than theologically." C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, at 123.

1Co 6:18-20 Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

Paul here is speaking of sexual immorality. The Greek term for "immorality" used here is *proneia*, more precisely translated as "fornication" or "harlotry." Paul is speaking of how sexual sins are sins against the physical body. He also compares the body to a temple, a physical structure that houses the Holy Spirit.

1Co 7:2-5 But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

By referring to sexual relations between husband and wife, Paul is again emphasizing the physical.

1Co 9:24-27 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

Paul speaks here of disciplining the body, much as we might speak of working out at the gym. Although Paul is using a reference to the body to make a point about developing ones self spiritually, he does so by emphasizing the physical conditioning of the body.

1Co 13:3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

By speaking of "burning" his "soma," Paul is clearly emphasizing the physical part of his being. The spirit and the psyche do not burn. The body does. Whether this means being burned to death as a martyr, branded as a slave, or self-immolation, the physical meaning is inescapable.

2Co 12:2-3 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago--whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows--such a man was caught up to the third heaven. And I know how such a man--whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows.

The term for "body" used throughout these two verse is "soma." And by Paul's differentiation of experiencing this event in the body or out of it, he is clearly referring to experiencing it physically.

Gal 6:17 From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus.

Here, soma refers to Paul's own body, stressing the physical abuse he's suffered as a follower of Jesus. "Stigmata carries an uncompromisingly physical connotation, here with probable reference to wounds and scars...." Robert H. Gundry, Soma in Biblical Theology, at 49. Paul's reference to his own marks suggest that Jesus' body suffered as well.

1Th 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Here, Paul gives us the big three: the pneuma (spirit); the psyche (soul); and the soma (body). Obviously, the three are distinct and Paul uses "soma" to refer to the physical body.

Rom 4:19 Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb....

Paul here refers to the story of how Abraham, though very old, came to father Isaac. The reference is clearly to Abraham's physical body, which was considered too old to father a child.

Rom 6:12-13 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

Again Paul speaks of the "soma" regarding sexual sin, highlighting the physical.

Paul does use the term "soma" regarding humans in a metaphorical sense on a few occasions. However, such usages actually reinforce the physical emphasis of the term "soma."

The first usage is in the context of the Eucharist.

1Co 10:16 Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?

1Co 11:24-25 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

The reference to Christ's body is to the physical part of his being. The body was broken by scourging and crucifixion.

The second metaphorical usage is in reference to the Christian Church as the Body of Christ.

1Co 12:12-31 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But

now there are many members, but one body.... And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.

Paul's understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ has shaped much Christian theology. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that although the term is used metaphorical, it is strongly related to the physical body. The parts of the church are compared to part so human anatomy--the eye, the foot, the ear. The meaning is unequivocally physical. See also Eph 4:11-12 (And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.).

This survey is strongly reinforced by Robert H. Gundry's exhaustive study of the use of "soma" in Paul's letters. See *Soma in Biblical Theology, With Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology*, Robert H. Gundry. After examining the use of "soma" in Roman/Greek literature, in the LXX, in other Jewish literature, in the rest of the New Testament, and most exhaustively in Paul's letters, Gundry concludes that Paul's use of the term "soma" strongly emphasizes the physical part of man. Although Paul's anthropology is not entirely clear, and how the body, mind, and spirit relate to each other debatable, his use of the term soma "always carries a physical meaning." Gundry, at 155.

Accordingly, the very fact that Paul uses the term "soma" to explain the resurrection demonstrates that he is referring to a physical event that involves the body of the believer.

B. Paul's Use of Soma When Referring the Resurrection

With the above discussion in mind, I will proceed to discuss Paul's use of soma while referring to the resurrection.

1. 1 Corinthians 15

Perhaps the best known of Paul's statements about resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15 has been used by both sides of the debate. In the first set of verses, Paul discusses the resurrection appearances of Jesus to Peter, James, the Twelve, the 500, and to Paul. He then stresses the connection between Jesus' resurrection and that of the believers. The reason Paul is discussing these doctrines, which he stresses is what he originally taught them upon the founding of their church, is because his doctrine of the resurrection, or at least some part of it, has met skepticism in the Corinthian church.

Co 15:12 Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

This rather remarkable context should alert us to the fact that Paul has been teaching of a physical resurrection. Paul is writing to a predominantly Greek church. If Paul was merely speaking of a non-physical resurrection (which, to a Jew, is something of a contradiction of terms), it is doubtful that he would have met with such skepticism. As discussed above, the Greeks already believed in the immortality of the human soul. Their skepticism was reserved for the Jewish belief in a physical resurrection. Yet, in this letter, Paul is clearly addressing Greek-oriented skepticism in his teaching of the resurrection. Why would such skepticism arise? Because the Corinthian church's background denied, indeed did not have any place for, a bodily resurrection. It would have had far less trouble accepting Paul's doctrine of the resurrection if that doctrine emphasized a purely spiritual phenomenon

As Craig Blomberg explains:

"At any rate, the position of some in the Corinthian church is specified in verse 12 (How can some of you say that there is no resurrection from the dead?"), and it is to this challenge that Paul responds. By denying the resurrection, the Corinthians were almost certainly not denying life after death, virtually everyone in the ancient world believed in that. Rather, they would have been disputing the Jewish and Christian doctrine of bodily resurrection and endorsing one of the more Greek forms of belief that limited the afterlife to disembodied immortality of the soul (cf. 2 Tim. 2:17-18)." *1 Corinthians*, Craig Blomberg, 294-95.

1Co 15:35-38 But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?" You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own.

Paul again and again uses the term "soma" to describe what is resurrected. The use of this term, meant to imply the physical, establishes Paul's belief in the physical resurrection of Jesus and of Christians.

Additionally, that Greek skepticism of physical resurrection was at the heart of the problem becomes clear as Paul moves on to address another question raised by those who reject his doctrine of the resurrection-- what kind of body would a "resurrected body" be? The question is not about life after death (easily accepted by Greeks as a "spiritual resurrection"), but the idea of a physical resurrection itself was absurd to the questioner. Again, the fact that Paul is having to argue what kind of "soma" was raised strongly suggests that he has previously taught, and currently defending, the doctrine of a physical resurrection.

1Co 15:39-49 All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; 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. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So also it is written, "The first man Adam, became a living soul." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

First, Paul uses "soma" to throughout to describe the resurrected body.

Second, Paul uses the analogy of a seed, noting that it is "sown" a natural body but raised a spiritual body. This strongly suggests continuity between the first body and the new body, just as a seed becomes a plan, the old body becomes the new body. The obvious differences between the seed and the plan are irrelevant, as it is the continuity that we are concerned with.

It is significant that Talmudic literature uses the same analogy of a seed to explain the connection between the old body and the new one following the resurrection. According to the Talmud, Rabbi Meier used the metaphor of a grain of wheat sown into the ground but raised a blossoming flower: "If a kernel of wheat is buried naked and will sprout forth in many robes, how much more so the righteous." (b. Sanh. 90b). Not only does this highlight Paul's Jewishness, it further suggests that Paul was discussing--as was Rabbi Meier--a physical resurrection.

"[Paul] asserts the somatic nature of the resurrection by an appeal to analogies drawn from nature: grains of wheat; types of animals; celestial bodies. The substance of the argument is that in each instance God is able to produce a new order of life (resurrection) but does so in such a way that a correlation to somatic existence is maintained. The phrase translated as "bare kernel in the RSV is particularly interesting and has an important parallel in Jewish rabbinic literature (b. Sanh. 90b)... [H]is use of the seed analogy in 1

Corinthians 15:35-54 allows for both continuity and discontinuity between the present mortal body and the resurrected body of the believer." L.J. Kreitzer, *Body*, in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald Hawthorne, et al., at 74-75.

Third, although many have argued that the reference to a "spiritual body" implies a spiritual resurrection, this argument is without merit. Although Paul speaks of a "spiritual" body and a "natural" body, what is often overlooked is that both phrases are talking about the same thing—the "soma". The terms "spiritual" and "natural" do not change this. They are modifiers differentiating the nature of the body before and after, but in no way implying that one is physical and the other is not. According to Paul, the current body is a natural body. But, after the resurrection, it will be a spiritual body. In both cases, it remains a body (soma). The difference is not between physical and nonphysical, but between soulish and spiritual. Between, as the verses begin, corruptible and incorruptible.

It is anachronistic to conclude that the use of the term "spiritual" to modify the term "body" renders the body immaterial or nonphysical. The body is sown (dies) as a soma psychikon but is raised as a soma pneumatikon. That Paul does not intend psychikon to mean, simply, physical, is clear.

In 1 Cor. 2:14-15, Paul distinguishes between the "psychikos" person and the "pneumatikos" person. The difference is not between a physical and a nonphysical person. Rather, it is between the "natural" man and the "spiritual" man. The difference is not materiality, but acceptance of the workings of the spirit of God. The natural man is common and unable to understand the things of God. The spiritual man, while a physical being, is able to understand the things of God.

But what really clinches the understanding that calling the soma "spiritual" does not imply nonphysicality is Paul's use of the term "pneumatikoi" in 1 Corinthians 10.

1Co 10:1-5 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

Paul speaks of the Israelites following Moses in the wilderness as eating "spiritual" food," drinking "spiritual" drink, and getting the drink from a "spiritual" rock. 1 Cor. 10:3-4. This drink and food was, of course, material, but it was also spiritual because its source was God. ("for they were drinking from a spiritual rock, which followed them; and the rock was Christ"). Paul uses the word similarly here.

"In v. 3 Paul calls the manna 'spiritual' good, by which he probably means food miraculously provided by the Spirit of God, not food with a heavenly taste or texture. Nor indeed was the water spiritual in character. It was, rather, spiritually provided just as the rock was spiritually enabled to give water." Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, at 219.

So too with our bodies. Our present bodies come from the earth and are ruled by fleshly passions, but our future bodies will be a result of the working of the Spirit of God. Thus, they will be spiritual bodies.

1Co 15:50-54 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will 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 will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, Death is Swallowed up in victory.

What many often overlook is that the phrase "I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable" goes on to make clear that there is a physical resurrection and continuity between the physical body before and after death ("for this perishable must put on the imperishable"). The old body "puts on" the new body. The mortal "puts on" immortality. The difference here is not between physical and nonphysical, but between the nature of the old body and the nature of the new one.

The degree to which he thought of 'transformation', rather than either disembodiment or resuscitation, can be seen in his discussion of 'putting on' immortality. Thinking of those who would still be alive when the Lord returned, he wrote that the 'perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality'. This would fulfill the Scripture, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' (1 Cor. 15:53 f.). He used the same imagery in 2 Corinthians 5. The living are in an 'earthly tent', and they wish not to be 'unclothed', but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life' (1 Cor. 5:4). The metaphor changes from 'tent' to 'clothing', but the meaning is nevertheless clear. Immortality is 'put on' and replaces mortality. Paul was not thinking of an interior soul which escapes its mortal shell and floats free, nor of new life being breathed into the same body, but again of transformation, achieved by covering mortality with immortality, which then 'swallows' it.

E.P. Sanders, *Paul*, at 30.

Furthermore, it is naive to take the reference to "flesh and blood" to mean, merely, physicality or materiality.

Why then does he say 'flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom'? Ever since the second century doubters have used this clause to question whether Paul really believed in the resurrection of the body. In fact, the second half of verse 50 already explains, in Hebraic parallelism with the first half, more or less what he means, as Paul's regular use of 'flesh' would indicate: 'flesh and blood' is a way of referring to ordinary, corruptible, decaying human existence. It does not simply mean, as it has so often been taken to mean, 'physical humanity' in the normal modern sense, but 'the present physical humanity (as opposed to the future), which is subject to decay and death.' The referent of the phrase is not the presently dead but the presently living, who need not to be raised but to be changed; and this brings us back to the dual focus of verses 53 and 54. Both categories of humans need to acquire the new, transformed type of body.

N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, at 359.

See also Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, at 316 ("'Flesh and blood' in verse 50 was a stock idiom in Jewish circles for a 'mere mortal' and does not contradict what Paul has already stressed, that resurrection experience is a bodily on."); PHEME PERKINS, *Resurrection: New Testament Witness and Contemporary Reflection*, at 306 (describing "flesh and blood" as "a Semitic expression for human being (as in Gal. 1:16). It often appears in contexts that stress creatureliness and mortality").

Another explanation is offered by C.K. Barrett:

The Semitic word-pair 'flesh and blood' is 'only applied to living persons; the words flesh as well as blood exclude an application of the word-pair to the dead.' In the parallel line, corruption is used as an abstract noun instead of a concrete, for 'corpses in decomposition.' Dr. Jeremias sums up: 'The two lines of verse 50 are contrasting men of flesh and blood on the one hand, and corpses in decomposition on the other. In other words, the first line refers to those who are alive at the parousia, the second line to those who died before the parousia. The parallelism is thus not synonymous, but synthetic and the meaning of verse 50 is: neither the living nor the dead can take part in the Kingdom of God--as they are.'

C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, at 379.

In any event, the term "flesh and blood" does not preclude continuity between the old and new bodies.

2. Philippians 3

Phil. 3:20-21 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Both times Paul again uses soma to refer to body, the same as he does for the present bodies of those to whom he writes. This body will be "transformed" into an improved, incorruptible body. One that is animated by the spirit of God. The Greek term that Paul uses for "transformed" is "metaschematizo." Just as in English, it emphasizes the continuity between the two states. For example, the same term is used by Paul in 2 Cor. 11:14 when speaking of how Satan "transforms" himself into an angel of light (Darby and KJV translations, others translate the same term as "disguises").

Just as with the seed analogy, the old is transformed into the new. There is radical change from before to after, but no lack of continuity. The seed becomes the plant. The dead body becomes the new body.

3. Romans 8

Rom. 8:9-11 But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in you. If the Messiah is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised the Messiah from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Again Paul uses soma here. Jesus will give life to the mortal soma, not end it so that his followers can be freed into a nonphysical existence. Again Paul is speaking of a change to the existing body. And the reason it becomes spiritual is because of the change brought about by the spirit of God. The "body" that will be raised is our current "mortal body." The raising of our "mortal body" is linked to the raising of Jesus' own body, indicating a parallel of bodily resurrection between what happened to Jesus and what happens to us.

Verses 9-10 speaks to the present: "But you are not in the flesh, you are in the spirit. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness."

Note all the references to the present tense. Christians are in the spirit now. Their spirits are alive because of Jesus. But, their bodies are dead, despite that.

Contrast that with verse 11: "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 dwells in you."

Paul shifts tenses and notes that, even though we currently have "dead" bodies, the resurrection of Jesus guarantees that we will have new mortal bodies, infused with his Spirit. Though Christians still have a dead/mortal body despite the indwelling of the spirit, we will have a new life brought into our mortal bodies at the resurrection.

Later in Romans 8, Paul provides even more evidence that he is speaking of a bodily resurrection.

Rom. 8:18-23: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing

of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body."

Above we discussed how Paul envisioned the redemption of the material world. Paul reinforces that notion here by noting that creation "groans and suffers" for reconciliation with God. To be "set free from its slavery." Paul goes on to explicitly include our material bodies in that reconciliation by noting that "not only this but also we ourselves" will have our "soma" redeemed. Not our spirits. Nor our souls. But our material bodies.

Speaking of the connection between the reconciliation of the material world and the redemption of our bodies, Professor Scotts comments: "In this ultimate purpose we have solidarity with the rest of the material world. The fallen creation retains within it a redemptive purpose. It will be set free from corruption at the time when believers' mortal bodies are redeemed from their temporality and weakness (Rom. 8:18-23)." Stephen C. Mott, Ethics, in *The Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, at 272. William L. Craig describes this connection, thus: "Paul's doctrine of the world to come is that our resurrection bodies will be part of, so to speak, a resurrected creation (Rom 8.18-23). The universe will be delivered from sin and decay, not materiality, and our bodies will be part of that universe." William L. Craig, "The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus," in *Gospel Perspectives I*, pp. 47-74. Edited by R.T. France and D. Wenham. Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1980.

Once again, therefore, Paul speaks explicitly of the transformation--not cessation--of our bodies as fulfilling Christ' redemptive work.

4. Summary

After reviewing Paul's letters, E.P. Sanders described succinctly Paul's views of resurrection:

Paul, that is, thought of the resurrected Jesus neither as a corpse which had regained the ability to breathe and walk nor as a ghost. He regarded Jesus as 'first fruits' of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20) and thought that all Christians would become like him. He denied that the resurrected body would be the 'natural' body, but maintained that it would be a 'spiritual' body (1 Cor. 15:44-6). 'Not a natural body' excludes a walking corpse, while 'spiritual body' excludes a ghost (which would be called in Greek simply a 'spirit', *pneuma*). Positively, there would be continuity between the ordinary and the resurrected person, as there was in the case of Jesus. To express this, Paul used the simile of a seed, which, when planted, is in one form, but when grown, in another (1 Cor. 15:36-38).

E.P. Sanders, *Paul*, at 29.

III. Paul's Belief that the Believer's Spirit Immediately Departs to be with Jesus Demonstrates His Belief in a Bodily Resurrection

Paul's belief in an intermediate state between death and the resurrection precludes his belief in a nonmaterial resurrection. When Paul speaks of the resurrection, he is clearly envisioning a future event. It is not something that happens to a person when he or she dies. It is a specific point in the future that applies generally, to all who are dead and who are still living. However, Paul also believed that immediately upon the death of a Christian, that person went to be with Jesus. This is made most clear when he considers his own position as he if facing death.

Phi 1:21-24:

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

Paul reiterates this concept when discussing Christians in general.

2Co 5:6-8 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord-- for we walk by faith, not by sight--we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

E.P. Sanders explains the two different doctrines, and their sequence, concisely:

Conceptually, this is different from the expectation of the transformation or resurrection of all believers at the coming of the Lord.... It envisages the ascent of each person's soul at death, rather than the transformation of the entire group of believers, whether living or dead, at Christ's return. Without posing these two conceptions as alternatives, Paul simply accepted them both. If he died, he would immediately be with Christ; at the end the Lord would return and bring his own, in a transformed state, to be with him.

Paul, at 31-32.

If all Paul means by 'resurrection' is the escape of the spirit to be with God, then how can he envision this as happening immediately upon the death of the believers and also at a definite future event--the final judgment? Obviously, he cannot. The only solution is that Paul believes that the final resurrection is distinct from the intermediate state of spiritual life after death. In other words, the resurrection cannot be merely a spiritual occurrence. That has already occurred. The resurrection, therefore, is a bodily one.

In sum, a review of Paul's views on the body, the resurrection, and the intermediate state after death reveals that when he discussing the resurrection of Christians, as well as that of Jesus, he means a bodily resurrection.