

# 11



## The Final Resurrection

### Review

In the last chapter, I demonstrated that Christ's reference to the gospel of the kingdom being preached on this earth before he comes again is a reference to the "good news" described by Isaiah. Isaiah taught that the good news is the messianic kingdom being fully realized on this earth when God reigns over this world. Christ's reign will serve as a testimony to all nations that he is the true Lord of this world. These extraordinary prophecies of the messianic kingdom must be fulfilled on this earth *before* he comes again to rapture the saints and take us to heaven.

### The Transformed Body

Revelation reveals that the followers of Christ are destined to experience two resurrections. As men and women of God, we are destined to experience the first resurrection of our natural bodies so that we can inherit the Son's restored earth for a thousand years. And as children or sons of God, we are destined to experience the final resurrection of our eternal bodies so we can inherit the Father's eternal new earth. Paul taught:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ [who ascended to heaven and promised to return and take us to join him in his Father's house], who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body [adapted for heaven]. (Phil. 3:20–21 NIV)

Christ ascended to heaven to the Father, and we eagerly await his return from heaven. When Christ returns, he will transform our bodies to be like his glorious body. We will then inherit “our citizenship” in heaven to be with Christ and the Father in their eternal kingdom. Paul taught that our transformed Adamic bodies will be patterned on Christ's glorified body—an eternal body that will ascend to an eternal kingdom. But what will our raptured, glorified bodies be like?

### **Like the Pre-Ascended Christ's Body?**

Many theologians speculate that our future resurrected bodies will be like Christ's resurrected body that had appeared to the disciples while he was still on this earth. After his resurrection, Jesus approached the disciples:

Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!” But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. *For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.*” . . . He said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them. (Luke 24:36–43)

Christ had a resurrected body of flesh and blood and could even eat food. But his natural body was also immortal, so he did not have to eat to sustain his life. In contrast, Adam and Eve were mortal creatures in natural bodies of flesh and blood who did have to eat to sustain their bodies. Christ could walk through walls and could suddenly disappear or appear, but those events could simply be considered supernatural and not how he normally operated in a real body in space and time.

After appearing to many more believers, Christ physically ascended in the clouds to join his Father in heaven. When he comes again in the clouds, he will give us resurrected bodies like his glorified body. Many theologians conclude that since Christ had a real body of flesh and blood while he was on this earth, then we, too, will have similar immortal, natural bodies in the eternal kingdom. Our resurrection and ascension will be patterned on Christ's resurrection and ascension. We will not be disembodied spirits in heaven experiencing some form of spiritual bliss.

Many theologians also believe that we are not going to heaven. Rather, Christ and the Father are coming to dwell with us on this renewed earth for eternity, after it has been purged and purified by fire. This doctrine assumes that after Christ ascended to heaven, he remains in the same kind of resurrected body that he had while he was on this earth. In other words, the *post-ascended* Christ is just like the *pre-ascended* Christ who appeared to the disciples. When he comes again in his immortal body of flesh and blood, we will be given immortal natural bodies like his pre-ascended body. We will then dwell on a restored Genesis earth.

But is this doctrine biblically correct? I believe the Scriptures teach that when Christ ascended to heaven, his resurrected body of flesh and blood was transformed into a very different kind of glorified body adapted for the future new heavens and new earth that are created after this Genesis creation is destroyed. Our raptured bodies will be patterned on his glorified body, not on the natural body he manifested while he was still on this earth.

In fact, we will not know what Christ's glorified body is like until he appears again and gives us glorified bodies like his. Since no one has seen Christ in his post-ascended, glorified body, no one really knows what his eternal body is like. Therefore, when Christ returns, our transformed bodies will be like the unknown *post-ascended* body of Christ—not like the known pre-ascended body of Christ.

Consider the teachings of the apostle John. He saw the pre-ascended Christ when Christ appeared to him and the disciples. But notice that John does not reference this version of Christ's resurrected body as the model, or prototype, of what our future bodies will be like. Rather, he references the *unknown* post-ascended body that has not yet appeared as the model for our future raptured bodies:

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are [a new creation as sons of God that is neither male nor female]. . . . Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be *has not yet appeared*; but we know that when he appears [in his glorified body] we shall be like him [like the post-ascended body of Christ], because we shall see him as he is [in his glorified, eternal body]. (1 John 3:1–2)

John knew what Christ's resurrected body was like because he had seen the resurrected Christ. If our future bodies are going to be like the pre-ascended body of Christ that had appeared to John and the other disciples, then John could have simply said they are going to be like the resurrected body that he had seen, touched, and eaten with. But instead, John referenced the unknown glorified body of Christ that will be revealed from heaven on the last day—that is, the post-ascended body of Christ. When John said, “What we will be has not yet appeared,” he admits that he does not know what the children of God's raptured bodies will be like. Unless we know more about the nature of Christ's glorified body than John, it remains a mystery to us as well.

### The Transfiguration

The transfiguration foreshadows Christ in his glorified body when he returns, and it must have had a profound impact on John. Jesus taught:

“For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.” And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. (Matt. 16:27—17:2)

Natural human beings do not shine like the sun. The transfiguration that John witnessed gives us some idea as to what Christ's glori-

fied body will be like when he comes again. It will obviously be very different from the body that appeared to John and the disciples in the Upper Room.

Now that Christ has ascended to heaven, no one knows what his glorified body is like. Yet, many theologians continue to assert that our future raptured bodies will be modeled on the pre-ascended Christ, and they treat this belief almost as an orthodox tenant of the faith. If anyone teaches otherwise, he is branded as a heretic. Yet, I cannot find a single New Testament reference to the pre-ascended body of Christ as being representative of the kind of bodies we will have in the eternal kingdom! Again, none of the apostles reference the pre-ascended body of Christ that the disciples saw and touched as being a model of what our future raptured bodies will be like.

### Paul's Vision of the Post-Ascended Christ

The resurrected Christ had also appeared to the apostle Paul. But Paul was not converted until *after* Christ had already returned to heaven. Consequently, Paul saw the *post-ascended* body of Christ. And Christ was in a glorified body very different from the kind of body that the disciples saw and touched in the Upper Room. Paul's vision of the glorified Christ was so bright that it blinded him, and he had to be miraculously healed. Paul describes this event when he was being interrogated by King Agrippa:

At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, ***brighter than the sun***, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" . . . And I said, "Who are you, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." (Acts 26:13–15)

When Paul saw the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus, he did not sit down with him and eat lunch with him. That is because Paul saw the resurrected Christ *after* his ascension and *after* he was in his glorified body. He got a glimpse of the glorified Christ, who appeared brighter than the sun. The post-ascended Christ who blinded

Paul is distinctly different from the pre-ascended Christ who appeared to the disciples. Because of this experience, Paul declared that since Christ has ascended to heaven and is in his glorified immortal body, no one in a natural body on this earth has seen, or even can see, the post-ascended Lord:

To keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . . who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom ***no one has ever seen or can see***. (1 Tim. 6:14–16)

Christ is the only person to have received an immortal body. Since he entered the eternal kingdom, no one has seen him. And according to Paul, no one in his natural body ***can see*** the post-ascended, glorified Christ. Paul knew from firsthand experience that the post-ascended Christ was an unapproachable light to anyone in his natural body. Therefore, no one has ever seen or touched the glorified Christ.

Again, John and the disciples saw and touched the *pre-ascended* resurrected body of Christ. But Paul taught that the ascended Christ is in a transformed, immortal, and glorified body that no one in his natural Adamic body “*has seen or even can see*.” That is, until Christ comes again to transform our bodies to be like his glorified body. Then, we will be able to not only see him, but also to dwell with him and his Father in all their glory on the eternal new earth. To be in the very presence of the triune God in all his glory, we will need glorified bodies.

Despite claims to the contrary, no one knows what Christ’s glorified body is like. The apostles taught us that when Christ returns, we shall be like the ***unknown***, post-ascended, glorified Christ. No one knows what our future eternal habitat on the eternal new earth will be like, either. That is because it has not yet been created as the eternal home for the glorified sons of God. As such, we should not speculate as to what our future raptured bodies will be like or what the new earth will be like.

Yet, I imagine that if a young Christian asked his pastor what our future bodies will be like, the vast majority would say that our resurrected bodies will be like the pre-ascended body of Christ that the disciples saw, touched, and ate and drank with. I hear it all the time. I suppose that some people are uncomfortable with the mysteries of not

knowing what kind of glorified bodies we will have and what heaven will be like.

Theologians are making a serious mistake, however, when they insist that our resurrected bodies will be like the body of Christ that appeared to the disciples in the Upper Room. They are claiming to know more about our future bodies than John or Paul. Paul specifically warns against this kind of unbiblical speculation:

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. . . . I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us *not to go beyond what is written*. (1 Cor. 4:1–6)

When theologians claim that our raptured bodies will be like the pre-ascended body of Christ, they are clearly going beyond what is written, for there is no scripture to support this assertion.

### **A New Kind of Body**

One of the best discussions about our future eternal bodies can be found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. The pagan Roman religions did not believe in an afterlife that included a resurrected body. If there was an afterlife, only the human spirit survived to experience it. They viewed a resurrection of a body as a resuscitation of a corpse and thought of it as repugnant.

After the Roman Gentiles in Corinth accepted Paul's gospel and listened to his unusual teachings about our being a new creation as sons of God destined for an embodied existence in heaven, they must have been curious about what kind of bodies we will have after they are transformed and taken to heaven. They could imagine what a restored Adamic body would be like on a restored natural earth, but what would a transformed body be like? Paul called them "foolish" for even thinking they could know what kind of resurrected bodies they will have in the eternal kingdom. Paul's response was a strong rebuke for even asking about something that is fundamentally unknowable now.

Paul compared the way the natural body will be changed into a new kind of body to the way a seed or nut is transformed into something different when it is planted into the ground and germinates. One

cannot examine the seed or nut and determine in advance what the resulting plant will be like. Likewise, one cannot examine the current natural human body and determine in advance what the future immortal body will be like:

But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” *You foolish person!* . . . what you sow [the Adamic body] is not the body that 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. . . . So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. . . . It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. . . . The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust [a natural Adamic body], we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven [an eternal body]. I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood [the Adamic body] cannot inherit the kingdom of God, . . . Behold! 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 [at the rapture]. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed [into an eternal body adapted for the Father’s eternal kingdom]. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. (1 Cor. 15:35–53)

Paul is quite emphatic that the current natural Adamic body adapted for this earth does not represent the kind of body we will have after the final resurrection. That is because a perishable body of flesh and blood “cannot inherit the kingdom of God.”

Rather, the future bodies of God’s children will be patterned on the unknown, glorified Christ and will be adapted for the Father’s imperishable kingdom of heaven. Until we get to heaven, Paul admonishes us not to foolishly speculate as to the kind of bodies God will provide us so that we can dwell with him in his eternal kingdom.

In other words, Paul is teaching us that we cannot examine the current human body and have any idea what our future bodies will be like. Nor can we study the pre-ascended, non-glorified Christ as a model for our future raptured bodies. We will have real bodies, but the nature of those bodies remains a complete mystery. All we *do* know is that they will be immortal, imperishable, and incorruptible.

Paul compares this transformation process of the Adamic body that dies and returns to the dust of the earth to a variety of kernels or seeds that are sown into the ground and experience germination. When the outer shell or coat of the seed dies and falls away, the inner seed comes alive when it sprouts into a plant. This may seem obvious, but when a seed is planted and germinates, the result is not another seed exactly like the one planted. Rather, the seed is transformed into an entity that is very different from the original seed. It is sown as a seed, but it comes up out of the ground as a plant!

To further illustrate what Paul is teaching, consider a pecan and a pecan tree. When a pecan is planted, it does not come up out of the ground as another pecan. Rather, upon germination, the pecan is transformed into a pecan tree, which is vastly different in design and structure from the pecan that was planted in the ground. The mature tree represents a profound transformation of the small pecan. Most important, we cannot determine what the pecan tree will look like by examining the nut's exterior or by cracking it open and analyzing its interior. The pecan itself does not prefigure what the resulting pecan tree will be like. The pecan is transformed into a new entity with a totally different form, structure, and function.

Likewise, the Adamic body of flesh and blood that dies and is sown into the ground does not come up out of the ground when it is resurrected as the same kind of sexual Adamic human body. Rather, it is going to be transformed into a presently unknown kind of eternal body with a totally different form, structure, and function adapted for the new eternal habitat. One cannot discern what this new body will be like by analyzing the Adamic body any more than one can discern what a pecan tree will look like by analyzing the pecan. Paul is not stressing continuity with our current human bodies when we are resurrected; rather, he is emphasizing the incredible discontinuity.

Paul continued with another analogy to demonstrate God's immense creative ability to design and form different kinds of living creatures in this current creation:

But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. (1 Cor. 15:38–39)

Some bodies are created and designed to function on the ground, while others are created to operate in the air or in water. A human cannot live in the air or the ocean. A deer would have difficulty navigating the clouds. An eagle would not survive for long in the ocean. And a dolphin could not live on the land. Each unique *kind* of body that God created is adapted to its own environment, or habitat. Likewise, God will create a new kind of eternal body for the sons of God. It will be uniquely adapted for its new habitat that he will create in the new heavens and new earth.

Paul continues, “There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars” (1 Cor. 15:41). Even the planets and the stars are very different kinds of heavenly bodies. The illumination of the sun is different from that of the moon, which is different from that of the various stars.

With this elaborate illustration, Paul is making a simple, yet profound point about God's proven ability to create unique kinds of bodies adapted for different settings. Paul is reminding us that we have an awesome God! We do not need to know what kind of eternal bodies we will have in heaven, for we can trust our Creator to use this same incredible creativity once again when he creates our new kind of eternal bodies adapted for the new heavens and new earth. Being a child of God destined for a new creation necessitates a new kind of body adapted for that creation.

There will certainly be some continuity with our current bodies and this current creation. Paul taught that this Genesis creation will somehow be carried over into the eternal kingdom. But he did not identify any of the features of our current existence that will carry over. It all remains a mystery to us until the last day.

Yet, many theologians ignore these teachings of John and Paul and incorrectly assume that our transformed natural bodies will be like Christ's non-glorified body of flesh and blood that appeared to the disciples in the Upper Room. And from this false assumption, they extrapolate that we will inherit a restored natural earth as our eternal habitat.

Some of these theologians have set up a false dichotomy of the nature of our eternal bodies and eternal home. They claim:

- Our bodies will be patterned on Christ's pre-ascended body of flesh and blood, and we will dwell on a restored Genesis earth for eternity.
- Or our bodies will be immaterial and spiritual in nature, and we will dwell in a boring ethereal realm of heaven with our spirits floating around like angels.

The Scriptures plainly teach, however, that the future eternal body is neither a modified natural body of flesh and blood nor a disembodied spirit. The correct view of the future eternal body and eternal home is that when Christ comes again, the natural body will be transformed into a real but presently unknown kind of glorified eternal body like the unknown, glorified body of Christ. And the embodied eternal sons of God will dwell in a real but presently unknown kind of eternal habitat. In other words, as John and Paul taught, the natures of our eternal bodies and our eternal home remain a profound mystery for now! Theologians should learn to live with this mystery. And they should stop imposing features of the Adamic body and this Genesis creation onto our eternal existence on the eternal new earth.

Adam's body was made from the dust of the earth and was a natural body adapted for the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were the first human creatures fashioned into natural bodies and were the beginning of the human experience on this Genesis earth—natural bodies for a natural habitat. The human body is mortal because it needs outside sustenance from the produce of the earth to sustain itself. Adam and Eve were to multiply and fill the Edenic earth with their sons and daughters. The anatomy of the male and female human body is specifically designed around the functions of marriage and reproduction. All our communal relationships are a derivative of marriage.

The first resurrection will indeed be of the natural bodies of the departed saints so that we can inherit the restored natural earth during the millennium. That is because the 1,000-year messianic kingdom will be a restoration of our humanity. The curse will be removed, and mankind will experience a restored human paradise on this earth.

The ascended Christ, however, is the firstborn of the new order of being as sons of God. He has led the way to the heavenly kingdom—the future home of the succeeding sons of God. The transformed body will have neither a male nor a female anatomy and will no longer experience marriage and reproduction. The eternal body will be immortal and will not need food, water, and air to sustain itself. It will be imperishable and will not decay and die. It will be incorruptible, unable to disintegrate into its many parts. Our glorified bodies will be immortal, imperishable, and incorruptible—adapted for a new eternal habitat.

### Faulty Views of God's Endgame

I believe the primary reason many of the current views on God's endgame are flawed is because many theologians have wrongly assumed that the raptured body will be like the body of the pre-ascended Christ. This incorrect assumption has led these theologians to make grave mistakes when developing biblical theologies of the future. For example, premillennialists believe the first resurrection will be of the *raptured* saints so that they can reinhabit the restored earth when Christ returns to this earth. During the millennium, the glorified saints will comingle with natural human beings who survive the Tribulation.

After his resurrection, Christ comingled with the disciples and others while he was still on this earth. Because premillennialists believe our raptured bodies will be like Christ's pre-ascended immortal natural body, they have no problem envisioning the glorified saints comingling with natural human beings during the millennium. If Christ's resurrected body can eat and drink, then it would logically follow that the raptured saints can return to this restored earth in their immortal natural bodies to comingle with mortal human beings. They contend that we will have a different kind of body after we are raptured, but not that different.

Theologians are making a critical mistake when they build their view of God's endgame on these premises. The apostles never com-

pared our future eternal bodies to the pre-ascended Christ. Instead, they taught that our raptured bodies will be like the unknown, post-ascended, glorified Christ that has not yet appeared. And they taught that the nature of this new kind of body is such a mystery that Paul calls us “foolish” to even suppose that we can know what our raptured bodies will be like.

In fact, Paul specifically teaches that the Adamic body of “flesh and blood *cannot* inherit the kingdom of God,” even if it is an “immortal” natural body. Therefore, the raptured body will be very different from the current Adamic body of flesh and blood—and its eternal habitat will also be very different from the current Genesis earth!

### Summary

As children of God, we are a new order of being that is neither male nor female. In heaven, we will no longer experience the Adamic functions of marriage and reproduction. That is a major change in the very nature of our being that necessitates a new kind of body and a new kind of habitat. At the final resurrection after the millennium, our Adamic bodies will be transformed to be like Christ’s glorified body so they can be taken to the new heavens and new earth—a new kind of body for a new order of being on a new kind of earth. Our spiritual bodies will be real bodies, but they will be in the image of the resurrected Christ from heaven—not in the image of Adam and not in the image of the pre-ascended Christ.

God already demonstrated his remarkable creativity when he created the many different kinds of bodies suitable for different habitats on this Genesis earth. Paul taught us that we can trust our Creator to use this same infinite creativity when he creates a new version of our current bodies and a new version of the heavens and earth.