

Understanding *1 Corinthians 15* and the Nature of Existence After Death

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Version 1.0
August 26, 2018

Introduction

The typical Christian today believes that, after death, his soul will go to heaven to be with God. Since nothing about this belief is consistent with the teaching of the Bible, it is surprising how widespread it is. It shares more in common with the ancient Greek philosopher Plato than it does with the apostles.

In this paper I will explore what the Bible actually teaches about life after death. Since *1 Corinthians 15* specifically focuses on this issue, I will examine Paul’s argument in that chapter, paying close attention to its latter half. In order to understand Paul’s explanation of the resurrected body, I will explore what the Bible takes to be the ontological structure of a human being. Specifically, I will seek to understand the biblical concepts of the “spirit” and the “soul.” Finally, from Paul’s discussion in *1 Corinthians 15*, I will extrapolate to a more general understanding of the Bible’s teaching about existence after death.

Understanding 1 Corinthians 15:35-57

The greater part of this paper will examine the particulars of Paul’s discussion of the believer’s resurrected state in *1 Corinthians 15*. But before we can understand the particulars of Paul’s discussion there, we must reconstruct the background to his argument. Why is Paul addressing this issue, and who exactly is he addressing?

A Reconstruction of the Background to Our Passage

From Paul’s argument in *1 Corinthians 15*, it is evident that some among the Corinthian Jesus-believers insist that believers should have no expectation of a resurrection. What is not so evident is what exactly these individuals believe instead.

Do they believe that, when a believer dies, his spirit goes on to have a disembodied existence in “heaven” for all eternity? That is plausible, certainly. Many modern Christians believe something along these lines. And if this is in fact what these Corinthians believe, then note that they are not denying existence after death altogether. Rather, they are denying *earthly, embodied* existence after death—that is, they are denying that anyone returns to live in a body after he dies.

But perhaps, instead, they believe that death is the end of the believer’s existence altogether. When he dies, his body decays in the grave and he simply is no more. His death is the end of him. This too is plausible. Virtually every modern materialist and naturalist believes this very thing. However, it would surprise us to discover that a Christian (a follower of Jesus) believes such a thing.

So which is it? Do these particular Corinthians believe in a disembodied eternal existence after death? Or do they believe that death is the end of their existence altogether? When all the available clues within *1 Corinthians 15* are put together, we find that the latter of these two

options seems to fit the evidence best. Apparently, some of the Corinthian Jesus-believers believe that death marks the end of their existence. Once their bodies cease to be biologically viable and they die, they have reached their end, period.

How can we make sense out of this? How can they believe such a thing at the same time that they profess a belief in Jesus?

The Hellenistic Background to 1 Corinthians 15

Epicureanism

Epicureanism was a Hellenistic (Greek) philosophy that was popular in the Roman empire during the time of the apostle Paul. It was especially popular among the wealthy aristocratic elite. The Epicureans believed that everything was made out of indivisible, interchangeable units of being called "atoms." At death, the atoms that constitute the soul of a person are scattered and the person ceases to be. Man does not have an immortal soul or spirit. Death is his end.

Due, in part, to the popularity of Epicureanism, belief that death is the end of a man's existence was a doctrine that was utterly conceivable and completely believable in the time of Paul. The problem, however, remains: why would such a doctrine ever be embraced by a Jesus-believer? It is not at all obvious that such a belief would be compatible with belief in Jesus.

Jewish-Hellenistic Belief in Corinth

To make sense of this, we need to appreciate the degree to which Greek thought had influenced the Jews of Paul's day. Many first-century Jews had incorporated Hellenistic thought into their beliefs and perspectives. Indeed, there was a whole sub-culture of Hellenized Jewish thought.¹ And it is inevitable that Epicureanism would have been among the several schools of Greek thought that influenced these Hellenized Jews.

Undoubtedly, a Hellenized Jew could syncretize his Jewish beliefs with Greek thought in a number of different ways. But the particular way that certain Corinthian Jews had syncretized Hellenistic thought with their Judaism seems to run something like this:

The Scriptures of the Jews contain the promise of a coming golden age (namely, the promise of the coming Kingdom of God). The kingdom of God will be a time when righteousness will prevail on the earth, where sin and evil will be eliminated. As a Jew, I place hope in the promise of this coming kingdom. However, I know that I might very well die before the Kingdom of God arrives. I may never personally experience life in that golden age. I do not believe in any sort of personal immortality. I believe that after I die, I am no more. Hence, I may no longer exist when the Kingdom of God finally arrives. Nevertheless, I still find meaning and purpose in my hope of the coming of this kingdom. I wait expectantly for it, I am inspired and heartened by it, and I do what I can to work to bring it about. Furthermore, the coming Kingdom of God is intimately connected with the coming of God's Messiah. So I also hope in and expect the coming of the Messiah. For the Kingdom of God will not and cannot come until the Messiah has arrived. Again, I may no longer exist when the Messiah comes. But I

1. The Sadducees of Jesus' time are a famous example of a particular form of Hellenized Judaism. Because of the New Testament, the Sadducees are famous for, specifically, not believing in a resurrection from the dead. It seems highly likely that their propensity to reject the idea of a resurrection is due, at least in part, to the influence of Greek thought.

hope in his arrival nonetheless, for the same reason that I hope in the coming kingdom of God.²

It seems likely that those particular Jesus-believers in Corinth who did not believe in a resurrection from the dead were individuals who had come to believe in Jesus in the context of something like the above set of attitudes and beliefs. They were convinced that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Hence, they believed that they lived in a very significant and exciting time. Namely, they lived during the time when God’s Messiah had been brought into history. And that is significant because, eventually, this Messiah would return—as he promised—and establish the promised Kingdom of God. That would be all the more significant and exciting. For the Kingdom of God would be that time in history when righteousness would rule over the whole earth and sin and evil would be eliminated. Now, since—according to these Corinthian believers—a person’s death is the end of his existence, they understood that they may not actually live to experience the return of Jesus and the arrival of the Kingdom of God.³ But no matter. While that would be terribly unfortunate, it is nonetheless enough to know that eventually the day would come when mankind would finally see justice, righteousness, and peace on the earth.⁴

This would appear to be the very viewpoint that Paul is addressing in *1 Corinthians* 15. The one who takes this perspective believes that Jesus is the Messiah. However, his only hope is that one day the world will see the return of the Messiah and the arrival of the promised Kingdom of God on earth. Since there is no immortality, he may very well not be around to see the promised kingdom arrive. But it is a wonderful hope nonetheless. And he purports to find joy in this promise of a world where righteousness will finally win out—even if he will not be around to experience it.

The First Half of Chapter 15

The Centrality of Resurrection to the Gospel

Paul’s initial response to those who reject the reality of the resurrection is to point out how the fact of bodily resurrection is *central* to the gospel message he proclaims. In the first place, *the resurrection of Jesus*—which he asserts on the basis of overwhelming eyewitness testimony—is a major, indispensable element of the gospel message. Jesus died for our sins. And his resurrection is critical to our being able to know that our sins are forgiven. It allows us to know that God accepted Jesus’ propitiatory offering on our behalf. Therefore, if there is no

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2. I would argue that this mindset results from embracing one’s Jewish heritage at the same time that one seeks to embrace the Hellenistic belief that death is the end of one’s personal existence.
 3. In all likelihood, this is the significance of *1 Corinthians* 15:18. If there is no such thing as a resurrection, then those in Christ Jesus who have “fallen asleep” and perished will never to see the kingdom of God come to fruition. Here Paul is articulating the implications of the actual beliefs of these particular Corinthian believers.
 4. These Corinthian believers’ finding comfort in the hope of the Kingdom of God, even in view of the reality that they themselves may never see it, is not unlike the modern (social-political activist) folk singer who, on the one hand, believes that death will be the end of his existence but who, at the same time, expresses in song the hope, joy, and inspiration he finds in the promise of a new day of peace, justice, and social harmony in the world (even though he knows that he will never live to see such a day).

resurrection, we have no basis for confidence that our sins are forgiven. This is what Paul has in mind when he writes,

“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.” (1 Corinthians 15:13–17, NASV)

Resurrection As the Basis for Real Hope

Paul then turns to address the sanguine acceptance of personal destruction that seems to characterize the no-resurrection viewpoint that he is addressing. He writes,

“Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.” (1 Corinthians 15:18–19, NASV)

If the *only* content to a believer’s hope is that Jesus will one day establish the Kingdom of God on earth, then such a believer is to be pitied when he dies. If his death has prevented him from experiencing the one thing he has hoped in, then it has rendered his existence tragic and absurd. He has gained no personal benefit from the very kingdom in which he placed his hope. It has meant nothing for him personally. And there is no redeeming virtue in having hoped in a personally meaningless promise.

But that is not the situation in which a Jesus-believer actually finds himself. For, in fact, the Jesus-believer dies in the hope that he, like Jesus before him, will one day be raised from his grave:

“But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.” (1 Corinthians 15:20–28, NASV)

It is this fact that makes the hope of the gospel personally meaningful. Each and every believer can have an expectation that one day, because of his belief in Jesus, he will be raised from the dead and will be rendered immortal.

Paul's Real Personal Hope in His Own Resurrection

Finally, through a couple of rhetorical questions, Paul emphasizes how essential and fundamental to his own worldview is his belief in the resurrection:

“Why are we also in danger every hour? I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at

Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE.” (1 Corinthians 15:30–32, NASV)

If Paul did not personally believe that he was going to be raised from the dead, then it would follow logically that he would be reluctant to put himself in danger of losing his life. But, as a matter of fact, he is constantly putting himself in danger. And he does so in order that he might teach and proclaim the gospel to others. The reason he is willing to risk his life as he does is because of his expectation of a glorious, immortal life after death. If he believed that death would be the end of him, then it would make no sense for him to daily risk his life to spread a message about a Kingdom that he might never see. If he believed that death would be the end for him, then, logically, he should just “eat, drink, and be merry.” But he knows that death is not the end for him. So he is willing to put his life at risk in order that he might offer to others the same hope that he himself has.

The Primary Message of the First Half of Chapter 15

In 1 Corinthians 15:1–34, Paul—in a few different ways—establishes that the reality of the resurrection is central to the gospel message he proclaims. It is not a peripheral issue. Hence, there is no room for dissent. If resurrection is *not* a viable concept, then the gospel that the apostles proclaim—and all that is “good” about it—is completely undermined. By clear implication, therefore, it is vitally important that his Corinthian readers not be taken in by this other viewpoint that is so inimical to the gospel of Jesus.⁵

The Teaching of 1 Corinthians 15:35–57 Itself

Verse-By-Verse Discussion

Having established that bodily resurrection is a concept that is essential to the gospel message itself, Paul—in 1 Corinthians 15:35—turns his focus toward two specific questions: (1) how is bodily resurrection possible, and (2) what exactly does bodily resurrection mean—or more specifically, what sort of body are believers alleged to have in this resurrection?⁶ In his response to these questions, Paul explains the nature of the believer’s existence after death. The primary purpose of this paper, then, is to explore 1 Corinthians 15:35–57, Paul’s most complete statement concerning the nature of a believer’s existence after death.

Below, I have reproduced the New American Standard Translation of 1 Corinthians 15:35–57. After each verse reproduced below—whenever I deemed it helpful—I included one or more notes that attempt to explicate what it is that Paul is saying in that verse. Furthermore, after each

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5. And it is equally important that twenty-first century Jesus-believers not be taken in by this false perspective. Any understanding of biblical faith that does not presuppose that I will be personally resurrected and given new, immortal existence when Jesus returns is a false understanding of the gospel. Such a false understanding diminishes it, rendering its promise meaningless and irrelevant.
 6. We can reasonably assume that these questions reflect the primary objection to the idea of bodily resurrection that those Corinthians who teach that there is none typically raise. Specifically, the body that decays in the grave cannot be the body that I have when I am resurrected. And yet that body is the body that has made me me. So what body am I supposed to have when I come back to life in the resurrection? If the very body that made me me decays in the grave such that I cannot come back to life in that body, then in what body am I supposed to come back to life? Wouldn’t it be a completely incoherent doctrine that teaches that I come back to life in some *other* body? If I come back to life in some *other* body, then in what sense is it *I* that is coming back to life? There seems to be no available body for *me* to come back to life in.

English word of the NASB translation, when important, I have included—within brackets—the Greek word that is being translated:

1 Corinthians 15:35

But someone will say, “How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body {soma} do they come?”

1. Clearly, some of the Corinthians reject the idea that there even could be a bodily resurrection. Everyone knows what happens to a body when it has been placed in a tomb. It decays. So, how can a person raise up out of the tomb and live? He has no body left. His body decayed and was destroyed in the grave. So, without a body, how can a person enter back into history and act again like an ordinary person? It makes no sense. So, the universal fact that our bodies decay makes it impossible to believe that one day we will rise up out of our graves to new life. We will have no viable bodies with which to do such a thing. Therefore, the universal and undeniable corruption of the corpse makes the bodily resurrection of believers an incoherent doctrine. Belief in bodily resurrection is inconsistent with the known empirical fact of bodily decay.

1 Corinthians 15:36

You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies;

1. Paul responds by correcting the false assumption behind their challenge to resurrection. The doctrine of bodily resurrection does not teach that I will come back to life in the *same body* I had when I died. Rather, it teaches that I will come back to life in *a new and different* body—a body that, while it is certainly related to my original body, yet, at the same time, is an entirely new and different one. So, yes, *the old body does decay*. But that is not the body into which I will be resurrected. Just like seeds sown in a field, the seeds must “die” and cease to exist if the plant that grows out of them is to come into existence. Likewise, my old body must die and cease to exist if the new body that “grows out of it” is to come into existence.

1 Corinthians 15:37

and that which you sow, you do not sow the body {soma} which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else.

1. Developing the analogy that he began in the last verse, Paul stresses the fact that the seed that one plants when he wants to grow a plant is a fundamentally different “body” from the “body” of the plant that grows out of it. The wheat seed is a very different body from the wheat plant. I don’t plant a miniature wheat plant in the ground and wait for it to grow bigger. Rather, I plant a plain little speck of matter (a wheat seed) in the ground and wait for a wheat plant to grow out of it.

1 Corinthians 15:38

But God gives it a body {soma} just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body {soma} of its own.

1. The body of a plant is not determined by the body of the seed it grows from. God gives to each plant whatever body he wants to give to it. (And different plants have different bod-

ies.) Likewise he gives to each seed whatever body he wants to give to it. (And different seeds have different bodies.)

1 Corinthians 15:39

All flesh {sarx} is not the same flesh {sarx}, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh {sarx} of beasts, and another flesh {sarx} of birds, and another of fish.

1. When it comes to the bodies of various other beings, the “flesh” of all the different creatures is very different. God created wide variety into his creation. Different creatures take very different forms.

1 Corinthians 15:40

There are also heavenly {epouranios} bodies {soma} and earthly {epigeios} bodies {soma}, but the glory {doxa} of the heavenly {epouranios} is one, and the glory of the earthly {epigeios} is another.

1. The variety in God’s creation extends to his making bodies that are suited to living on the earth as well as his making bodies suited to the created beings that populate the heavens. Each type—earthy and heavenly—possesses its own unique beauty and wonder.

1 Corinthians 15:41

There is one glory {doxa} of the sun, and another glory {doxa} of the moon, and another glory {doxa} of the stars; for star differs from star in glory {doxa}.

1. Among the heavenly beings, each different being has its own unique beauty and wonder.

1 Corinthians 15:42

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body;

1. Here Paul describes being “sown” in a state of perishability, but being “raised up” into a state of imperishability. This is a direct reference back to the portion of Paul’s argument that immediately preceded this. In the earlier argument—*1 Corinthians* 15:35–41 (esp., 15:36–38)—Paul argued that when you grow a plant (e.g., a flower), you don’t plant a smaller version of the plant (flower) in the ground and wait for it to grow bigger. Rather, you plant a little grain of stuff that, after it has fully matured and reached its *telos*, becomes a beautiful flower. The “body” it had at the start (the seed, a plain little grain of something) is radically different from the body that it has when it is fully grown (the flower, the wheat, or whatever). By analogy, when the current body that I have dies, it is being “sown” (like a seed) with the expectation that from it will arise a radically different body—my immortal, resurrected body. Paul uses the word “sown” here in order to connect what he is saying here to the analogy that he was making earlier (in 15:36–38). So Paul’s principle analogy is this: a seed is to the plant that grows from it as our current perishable body is to the imperishable body that we will have after our resurrection.
2. Paul’s primary point is that the resurrection does not restore me to my current existence in my current body. Rather, it gives me a whole different kind of body and a whole different kind of existence. While I will keep my essential identity—that is, I will remain the same individual being that I now am—everything else about me will be transformed into something new and different. My current body is “sown” a perishable body, but—at the res-

urrection—it will be raised up an imperishable body. But, within the course of the larger argument in 1 Corinthians 15, imperishability is not the only difference to be found in my resurrected body. My resurrected body will be as much different from my current body as a plant is from the seed out of which it came.

1 Corinthians 15:43

it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;

1. Here Paul specifies two other important ways—besides imperishability—that my resurrected body will be superior to my current body. Firstly, my current body is in a state of dishonor relative to the superior “glory” of my resurrected body. And, secondly, my current body is in a state of weakness relative to the superior “power” of my resurrected body.

1 Corinthians 15:44

it is sown a natural {psychikos} body, it is raised a spiritual {pneumatikos} body. If there is a natural {psychikos} body, there is also a spiritual {pneumatikos} body.

1. There are two important interpretive questions here: What does Paul mean by a *psychikos* {=natural, = soulish} body? And, what does Paul mean by a *pneumatikos* {=spiritual} body? One thing is clear: the *psychikos* {=natural, = soulish} body is the one that we currently have in this present existence, for it is the body that is “sown” and will be raised up into a *pneumatikos* {=spiritual} body.
2. It should also be clear that the designation *pneumatikos* does **not** identify the material or stuff out of which a *pneumatikos* body is made. That is, a *pneumatikos* body is not a body made of *pneumatikos* (spiritual) stuff. As I understand the word *pneumatikos* (spiritual), it would be impossible for any body to be composed of *pneumatikos* (spiritual) stuff. The word ‘*pneumatikos*’ (spiritual) means (or at least includes the attribute of) not being made of stuff at all. Hence, a *pneumatikos* body would be an inherently contradictory notion. It would be a body that is not a body.
3. What makes the most sense in this context is to understand the adjective *pneumatikos* to be specifying **the source or origin** of the *pneumatikos* body. The resurrected body that we will receive does not originate in the normal, natural, physical manner that our current biological bodies do. Our new body will originate in a totally inexplicable, unanalyzable, and invisible way. That is, it will be *pneumatikos* (spiritual) in its origin. In all likelihood, what Paul is describing here is a body that has as its origin a supernatural act of creation *ex nihilo* by God. Unlike our current bodies, that come about through biological procreation, our new bodies will simply be created out of nothing by the Spirit of God. That, it would appear, is what Paul means when he describes our new bodies as “spiritual” {*pneumatikos*}. Later, in 1 Corinthians 15:51–52, Paul asserts, “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.*” [emphasis mine] In a moment of time, God will simply recreate us into immortal beings who have completely new and different bodies. Our new bodies do not need to come about through anything akin to biological generation. They will simply be created by God (= the Spirit [*pneuma*]) in an act of *ex nihilo* creation. Being direct creations of

God, these bodies can be said to be *pneumatikos*. In other words, they will not be “natural” and “of this earth.” They will be of a wholly new and different nature—fresh, direct creations of God—which could be said to be “supernatural” and “of the Spirit.”

4. Paul does not attempt to describe or identify of what sort of stuff our wholly new and different resurrected bodies will be made. In all likelihood, he himself has no clue what they will be like. All he knows is that (1) they will be wholly new and different from the body we have now, and (2) they will be directly and immediately created by God. This, and only this, is what Paul intends to convey by identifying our new resurrection bodies as spiritual (*pneumatikos*) bodies.
5. What does Paul mean by describing the body that we currently have, in this existence, as a *psychikos* {=natural, = soulish} body? I will answer this question in the notes following 1 Corinthians 15:45 below.
6. Paul writes here, “If there is a natural {*psychikos*} body, there is also a spiritual {*pneumatikos*} body.” We can paraphrase this in this way: if there is a body through which we express ourselves in the present existence we are now in, then there will similarly be a body (of an entirely different sort) through which we will express ourselves in our future existence after death. This is a *clear* and *explicit* statement that eternal existence beyond the grave is **not**—as Christianity has traditionally taught—a **disembodied** existence. We will not exist as “disembodied souls” or “disembodied spirits.” Rather, we will exist as embodied beings in eternity just as surely as we exist as embodied beings here in this existence. Granted, we will have new, different, and much more glorious bodies in eternity than the ones we have now. But we will most certainly have bodies. For “If there is a natural {*psychikos*} body, **there is also a spiritual {*pneumatikos*} body.**”

1 Corinthians 15:45

So also it is written, “The first MAN, Adam {Αδάμ}, BECAME A LIVING SOUL {ψυχὴν ζῶσαν= a living psyche}.” The last Adam {Αδάμ} became a life-giving spirit {πνεῦμα ζωοποιοῦν = a life-giving pneuma}.

1. To understand what Paul is saying here, we must first identify who he means by “the first man, Adam” and by “the last Adam.” The “first man, Adam” is quite clearly the first human male whose creation is described in *Genesis 2*. But who is “the last Adam”? Paul seems to be identifying Jesus as “the last Adam.” His reasoning appears to be that, because Jesus is the first, prototypical member of a whole new kind of human being, he is analogous to Adam in that respect (since Adam was himself the first, prototypical member of a whole race of human beings). Elsewhere, Paul describes Jesus as the “firstborn among many brothers.” And he states that those of us who believe in Jesus will be “conformed to the image of his [God’s] Son.” In all of these statements, the underlying belief is that one day, in eternity, the believer in Jesus is going to be transformed into the same kind of human being that Jesus is now—and into having the same kind of existence that Jesus has now—after his resurrection. So, the “last Adam” is not Jesus *per se*. More accurately, the last Adam is the **resurrected** Jesus. (It is not Jesus as he existed before his resurrection, but specifically Jesus as he now exists after his resurrection.)
2. Paul’s purpose in this sentence is to explain—and perhaps, to some extent, justify—the distinction he just made (in the previous verse) between a *psychikos* {= natural, = soulish} body and a *pneumatikos* {= spiritual} body. In any event, he wants to explain how he is using his

terminology. Specifically, he wants to explain what he means by a *psychikos* body? Therefore, citing the creation of the first male, Adam, in *Genesis*, Paul reminds his readers that—after God had breathed into his nostrils the breath of life—Adam was brought into existence as “a living soul (*psyche*).” Hence, the very first, prototypical human being—the progenitor of the whole race of us human beings that currently exist—was “a living soul.” Because we exist in the likeness of the “first man,” we all come into the world as “living souls (*psyche*)” as well. However, when Jesus was raised from the dead, he became a new Adam—that is, he became the prototypical human being for a whole new and different line of human beings. In fact, he became the prototypical human being for those individuals who would dwell forever in the eternal age to come.⁷ Now what sort of being was the resurrected Jesus, the “last Adam”? Jesus was not resurrected into the same sort of humanity as the first Adam had. He was not “a living soul (*psyche*)” like the first Adam became. God had created a completely new and different sort of body for Jesus. Jesus was given a body that had been created for him directly by God himself. God did not create it out of the dust of the earth, as he had for Adam. Rather, from all appearances, God created his body out of nothing, *ex nihilo*. The way Paul expresses it is this way: in contradistinction to the first man, Adam, who was a “a living soul (*psyche*),” the last Adam {the resurrected Jesus} was “a life-giving spirit {πνεῦμα ζωοποιῶν = a life-giving *pneuma*}.” Now Paul calls the resurrected Jesus “life-giving” because the risen Jesus is the one who gives life (eternal life) to whomever he chooses. (See *John* 5.) But why does he call him a “life-giving **spirit**”? I answer that in the note below.

3. To call the risen Jesus a “life-giving spirit (*pneuma*)” is confusing. We typically think of a spirit (*pneuma*) as a disembodied, invisible being. But that is not what the risen Jesus was. The risen Jesus was an embodied being. He was not a *pneuma* in the sense in which we typically think of it. Granted, Jesus’ body—after the resurrection—was of a different type from that of other human beings. But it was a body. Therefore, it seems highly unlikely that Paul intends to describe the resurrected Jesus (the last Adam) as a disembodied being. Furthermore, Paul’s purpose in *1 Corinthians* 15:45 is to explain the statement that immediately precedes it in *1 Corinthians* 15:44, “If there is a natural {*psychikos*} body, there is also a spiritual {*pneumatikos*} body.” Paul explains and defends his claim in 15:44 with this claim here in 15:45—the first man, Adam, was a living soul (*psyche*) who had a *psychikos* body made of the dust; the last man, Jesus, was a being whose *pneuma* expressed itself through a specially-created *pneumatikos* body, made directly by God. Paul employs the word *pneuma* here as a short-hand for the much more complex concept of “a being whose *pneuma* expresses itself through a specially-created *pneumatikos* body, made directly by God.” When we understand it along these lines, it becomes clear why Paul assumes that his assertion here (in 15:45) serves as evidence for the existence of a *pneumatikos* body that will follow the existence of one’s *psychikos* body (asserted in 15:44). It makes sense, therefore, to understand *pneuma* here (in “life-giving spirit”) to denote a “spiritual being,” in the sense of one whose being is given to him directly by the Spirit of God himself. His being was not given to him through nature, as was every son of the first

7. Hence, as a matter of fact, he became the “**last** Adam,” insofar as he will be the second and the **last** human being ever to serve as a prototype and origin of a line of human beings to follow after him.

Adam. It was given to him directly by the Spirit of God, unmediated by nature. Hence, he was a being who was *pneuma*, because he had a body that was *pneumatikos*.

1 Corinthians 15:46

However, the spiritual {*pneumatikos*} **is not first, but the natural** {*psychikos*}; **then the spiritual** {*pneumatikos*}.

1. Paul’s comment here pertains to a human being’s successive bodies. Each of us (if we have a destiny in the eternal age to come) will have two different bodies during the course of our created existence, a *psychikos* one and a *pneumatikos* one. However, they will be given to us in a very definite order. We do not begin with our *pneumatikos* body, we begin with our *psychikos* body. Only then—after we die and are raised again—will we be given our *pneumatikos* body.
2. Paul intends this to follow immediately from 15:44 (with 15:45 intervening to offer some evidence of the existence of these two different bodies). We could render what Paul intended to say this way: If there is a natural {*psychikos*} body, there is also a spiritual {*pneumatikos*} body. However, the spiritual {*pneumatikos*} is not first, but the natural {*psychikos*} is first; then the spiritual {*pneumatikos*} comes after that.

1 Corinthians 15:47

The first man is from the earth {ἐκ γῆς = ek ges}, **earthy** {χοϊκός = choikos}; **the second man is from heaven** {ἐξ οὐρανοῦ = ek ouranou}.

1. By “the first man” here, Paul means to denote the man Adam. By “the second man” here, Paul means to denote the man Jesus, but specifically the *resurrected* Jesus. By calling Jesus the “second man” here Paul means the same thing as “the last Adam” in 15:45.
2. To assert that the first man Adam is “from the earth” and therefore “earthy {*choikos*}” is to allude to the *Genesis* account where it says that God took of the “dust of the ground” and “fashioned a human being” into whose nostrils he breathed the “breath of life.” Adam is formed from the earth, the dust, the ground. Adam’s body is made of the same sort of stuff as the rest of God’s physical, material creation.
3. To assert that the second man Jesus is “from heaven {*ek ouranou*}” is simply to assert that the Jesus, at his resurrection, received a new body that was created by God himself. (“Heaven” is here used figuratively as a reference to God himself. To be “from heaven” is to be “from God.”) Paul is not specifying from what sort of stuff the body of the second man is made (in parallel to the first man being “earthy”). Rather, he is specifying the source of Jesus’ resurrected body instead. The source of the new body of the resurrected Jesus (the second man) is to be found in the creative activity of God himself. Paul means to suggest that Jesus’ new resurrection body was given to him directly and immediately. It did not come about through some “natural” process. It was an act of special creation by God.

1 Corinthians 15:48

As is the earthy {χοϊκός = choikos}, **so also are those who are earthy** {χοϊκός = choikos}; **and as is the heavenly** {ὁ ἐπουράνιος = ho epouranios}, **so also are those who are heavenly** {οἱ ἐπουράνιοι = hoi epouranioi}.

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1. Paul’s point here is quite straightforward. Every human being who is a child of Adam has an “earthy” {choikos} body that is alike in kind to the “earthy {choikos} body of Adam himself. Similarly, every human being who belongs to Jesus and who will inherit life in the eternal age to come will have a “from heaven” or “heavenly {epouranios}” body that is alike in kind to the “heavenly {epouranios}” body that the resurrected Jesus was given.

1 Corinthians 15:49

Just as we have borne the image of the earthy {choikos}, we will also bear the image of the heavenly {epouranios}.

1. This verse simply restates, in different words, what Paul has just stated in the preceding sentence (15:48). “Just as we have borne the image of the earthy {choikos}” means this: *just as we all began our existence with an earthy {choikos} body and person that resembled and looked like the earthy {choikos} body and person that Adam had.* Then, similarly, “we will also bear the image of the heavenly {epouranios}” means this: *so shall we all, in eternity, exist with a body and person that resemble and look like the body that the resurrected Jesus had—a body that was provided to him directly from heaven (from God).*
2. Therefore, to paraphrase this statement: *Just as we now, in our current existence, have an earthy {choikos} body that resembles and looks like the earthy {choikos} body that Adam had, so shall we, in our eternal existence, have a body that resembles and looks like the body of the resurrected Jesus, namely, a body that was created directly by God from heaven.*

1 Corinthians 15:50

Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

1. We can paraphrase this statement like this: *Brothers, I can tell you this—it is not possible to exist in and be a part of the eternal kingdom of God that is to come in our present state as “earthy” beings—that is, as beings made of the same stuff as this present physical universe (= “flesh and blood”). Again, it is not possible to exist in and be a part of the eternal age to come (an age marked by imperishability) if I remain in a state of perishability. To experience the eternal, imperishable age to come, I must be transformed. I must be transformed from being a perishable, flesh-and-blood person to being an entirely new and different sort of imperishable person.*

1 Corinthians 15:51

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed,

1. We can paraphrase this statement like this: *Here’s a secret. Not all of us Jesus-believers will die before Jesus returns to establish his kingdom on earth; but every Jesus-believer—even those who have died before Jesus returns—will be changed from our present perishable state to our eternal imperishable state.*

1 Corinthians 15:52

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.

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1. We can paraphrase this statement like this: *Our transformation will happen in a brief moment, in just a flash. At the return of Jesus, when he comes to establish his kingdom at the end of history—that is, when the last trumpet sounds to announce his coming—those who belong to Jesus who have already died and are buried in their graves will be raised up out of their graves and will be instantaneously transformed into imperishable beings. And, at the very same time, all the rest of us who belong to Jesus (who have not already died, but who remain alive at Jesus' coming) will be instantaneously transformed into imperishable beings as well.*

1 Corinthians 15:53

For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

1. This is the point Paul is making here: my present perishable state must give way to a newly created imperishable state, and my present mortal state must give way to a newly created immortal state. Why? For the reason already stated in 15:50. I cannot continue on to exist in the eternal age to come without being changed in this way. For it is not possible for a perishable being to exist in an imperishable reality. And it is not possible for a mortal being to exist in an immortal reality.

1 Corinthians 15:54

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.

1 Corinthians 15:55

"O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?"

1 Corinthians 15:56

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law;

1. Paul's point here is this: I (along with any and every other human being) am subject to the doom of death because of the fact and reality of my sinfulness. In other words, I am condemned to a destiny of death because my sinfulness makes me unworthy of being granted eternal life. Furthermore, the power (authority) that condemns me to a destiny of death because of my sinfulness is found in the law. Death is the sentence that the law decrees for my sinfulness.

1 Corinthians 15:57

but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Paul's point here is this: Thanks be to God, my sin will not result in my having to undergo death and destruction, because—in view of our lord, Jesus the Messiah—we are handed a victory over the inevitable doom that otherwise our sin would require for us. In Jesus, we receive mercy and the blessing of eternal Life, and not a condemnation to death.

Conclusions from 1 Corinthians 15 Regarding Our Resurrected Bodies

We have seen how Paul—in the face of a certain sort of objection—makes a case for bodily resurrection being the ultimate destiny for those who belong to Jesus. What conclusions can we

draw from the argument that Paul makes in *1 Corinthians* 15 with regard to the nature of our resurrected bodies? There are nine salient points that we can derive from what Paul says—either from what Paul says explicitly or from certain implications of what he says:

1. The body that we get when we are resurrected from the dead is significantly different from the body we currently have. In particular, it will be significantly more glorious and wondrous than the one we have now. As Paul puts it, the body we receive at our resurrection will be as much more glorious than our current body is as a flower is more glorious than the seed from which it grows. [See *1 Corinthians* 15:35–54.]
2. The body that we currently have is from and like the earth. In other words, we currently have a body that is composed of the same sort of stuff as that of which the earth itself is composed. The body that we will get when we are resurrected from the dead is not composed of the same stuff—it is not composed of the stuff of the earth. It will be constituted of something fundamentally and radically different. Paul does not tell us of what it will be composed. (Presumably, because he himself does not know; for it is beyond human experience.) Rather than describing of *what* our resurrected body will be composed, Paul instead describes *from whence* it will come. Namely, it will come from a direct act of divine creation. [See *1 Corinthians* 15:44–49.]
 - In other words, our resurrection bodies will be “heavenly” (granted to us directly from heaven); and, unlike our current bodies, they will not be “earthy” (made of the stuff of the earth). [See *1 Corinthians* 15:47–49.]
3. There is a likeness in kind between the sort of body that was given to the first Adam and the sort of body we currently have. Adam was the first human. He served as the prototype and origin of the line of human beings to which we belong. Likewise, there will be a likeness in kind between the sort of body that was given to the last Adam (Jesus) and the body that will be given to us at our resurrection. [See *1 Corinthians* 15:48–49.]
 - In other words, the question, “What sort of body will I have after I have been resurrected?” can be answered quite straightforwardly like this: you will have the same sort of body that the resurrected Jesus now has.⁸ [See *1 Corinthians* 15:15–23, 44–49, where this point is implicit in Jesus’ being called “the last Adam.”]
4. The individual that I shall be after I have been raised from the dead (or, after I have “taken on immortality”) is the selfsame individual that I am now. I will not be another, different individual. I will be the very same individual I am now. [This is an assumption implicit in the entire argument of *1 Corinthians* 15. The argument makes no sense without this assumption.]
5. Putting the above points together, it follows that *I am not defined by my body*. The form, shape, appearance, capabilities, and substance of my body does not define who I am as an individual. My individuality is defined by something other than my body. That is why I can receive a fundamentally different body at my resurrection and yet still remain me. This is perfectly in keeping with the analogy that Paul draws. When a plain little seed grows into a beautiful flowering plant, the body of the seed is ordinary and unremarkable compared to the

8. This does not fully answer the question, of course, because we don’t really know what sort of body the resurrected Jesus now has. As John puts it in *1 John* 3:2–3, “Beloved, now we are children of God, and *it has not appeared as yet what we will be*. We know that *when He appears, we will be like Him*, because we will see Him just as He is.” (NASV, emphasis mine).

body of the beautiful flowering plant into which it grows. Nevertheless, the seed is *one and the same individual creation* as is the beautiful flowering plant that it becomes. They are not different beings. They are the same being. They constitute different forms that are taken by one and the same being. So it is with us humans as well. My resurrected person is not a different being from the being I am now. The resurrected person that I will become and the person that I currently am constitute different forms that will be taken by *one and the same individual being*. [Derived from points 1–4.]

6. Paul understands the word “soul” (*psyche*) in *Genesis* to denote the personal being that results when some intangible, immaterial, non-physical reality is made to express itself in and through a physical human body. Hence, in describing Adam’s creation, *Genesis* reads, “Then the God, *Yahweh*, fashioned a human being out of the dust of the ground and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and that human being became a living person (*nephesh* / *psyche* / soul).” The soul (*psyche*) of Adam resulted when God breathed some intangible, invisible, non-physical reality into the physical body of Adam.⁹ In other contexts, this intangible, invisible, non-physical reality that makes a human person a person is what Paul (among others) calls the “spirit” (*pneuma*) of an individual.¹⁰ It would appear from Paul’s argument in *1 Corinthians* 15 that Paul would understand the spirit (*pneuma*) of Adam to be that which animates and expresses itself through the body (*soma*) created for Adam. And, that the combination of the two—the spirit that expresses itself and the body through which the spirit expresses itself—constitute what *Genesis* (at least) calls the “soul” (*nephesh* / *psyche* / person) of Adam. [See *1 Corinthians* 15:45 and *Genesis* 2:7.]
7. Here is what follows from the above: at the resurrection, the spirit of the Jesus-believer (which remains one and the same spirit as the one possessed by the Jesus-believer before his resurrection) will be given a wholly new and different body through which to express itself and act. Because his spirit is expressing itself through a significantly different body (*soma*), it follows that he will then become a significantly different *psyche* (soul / person).¹¹ However,

9. The description of God’s breathing this intangible reality into the nostrils of Adam is undoubtedly intended to be metaphorical rather than literal. God can certainly impart a “spirit” to a human person without breathing it into his nostrils.

10. Three comments: (i) See Appendix A for all the various ways that the Greek words *pneuma* and *psyche* are used. (ii) In the New Testament, the word *pneuma* is used in two importantly different kinds of contexts. On the one hand it is used in the context of an ontological (metaphysical) description of what constitutes a human being. In this sort of context, *pneuma* denotes the essential ontological element that makes an individual human being a living, active participant in created reality (rather than just an inert corpse). And on the other hand, it is used in a context describing the moral-spiritual nature of a human being. In the latter such context, *pneuma* denotes the locus of one’s moral-spiritual life and attributes. While these two sorts of contexts are importantly different, the ways in which the word ‘*pneuma*’ is used within them are certainly compatible. This is particularly clear if we understand the *pneuma* of an individual human being to denote the particular actor in the narrative of created reality that God has willed that person to be. God’s will includes not only the *fact* of an individual’s existence and the role that he will play, but it also includes every aspect of his *essential character*. It follows from this that *pneuma* can be used to describe the moral nature of a human being just as readily as it can describe the bare ontological fact of his existence. (iii) Finally, when Paul uses the word *pneuma* in his frequent discussion of the Spirit versus the flesh, he is using *pneuma* to denote the Spirit of God, not the spirit of a human individual. Granted, the Spirit of God does “sanctify” the spirit of the human individual who belongs to God (which introduces a great deal of confusion into the matter), but, typically, *pneuma* refers to the Spirit of God in those contexts, not to the spirit of the child of God.

11. One must not become confused by the use of the term ‘person’ here. We typically use ‘person’ as a synonym for ‘individual human being.’ However, *psyche* (person) does not mean merely an “individual human being” when it is employed in the New Testament. Rather, more exactly, *psyche* denotes the specific *form* that an individual human being has when he expresses himself in and through the particular body that God has created for him. After my resurrection, I do, in a sense,

while he will be a different *psyche* (soul / person), it does not follow that he is a different being. He is one and the same individual being after the resurrection as he was before. He retains his individual identity. What changes is the form taken by that individual identity. [Derived from points 1–6.]

8. I receive my new body—and hence my new *psyche* (soul / person)—when our Lord Jesus returns into our created reality and history. If I am in the grave when he returns, I am raised up out of the grave and transformed into the eternal person that I shall be for the rest of my eternal existence. If I am alive when he comes, I am raised up to meet him in the air and, in a flash, I am transformed into the eternal person that I shall be for the rest of eternity. [See 1 Corinthians 15:23 in the light of 1 Corinthians 15:50-57 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18.]
 - Note that, in his understanding of what is in store for the believer, Paul leaves no room for a disembodied soul going to heaven to be with God as he awaits Jesus’ return into history. Hence, after the believer dies, the believer remains dead in the grave until the last trumpet sounds. It is at that point that he is resurrected out of his grave.
9. By inference from what Paul asserts in 1 Corinthians 15:56—the “sting of death is sin”—there can be no immortality where there is sinfulness. (If sin causes death, then wherever sin exists, death will exist. It follows that where death does not exist, sin does not exist.) Hence, if we are transformed into immortal beings at the coming of Jesus, it follows that, at the same time, we will be transformed into righteous beings who are no longer inherently sinful. Our resurrected persons will be morally righteous persons. We will not remain the sinful persons that we currently are. [See 1 Corinthians 15:56 and 1 John 3:1–7]

The Anthropology Underlying 1 Corinthians 15

Underlying the nine beliefs listed above is a particular anthropology (that is, a particular theory of who and what a human being is and of what constitutes a human being). Arguably, the anthropology that underlies 1 Corinthians 15 is the anthropology that is espoused by the Bible generally. What then is the Bible’s anthropology?

No passage in the New Testament directly answers this question. Nowhere does the Bible explicitly articulate a theory of what constitutes a human being. We are left to reconstruct the Bible’s anthropology from various comments that are made here and there, in various different contexts.¹²

If, from various clues in the biblical writings, we were to reconstruct the Bible’s theory with regard to what constitutes a human being, here—I propose¹³— is what we would find:

become an entirely different person (*psyche*). But only to the extent that I have a fundamentally different body after the resurrection. While I can be understood to be a new *person*, I am not a new *being*. The sense in which I will become a new person is not totally foreign to the way we speak and use our language today. If a woman goes through a mid-life crisis and—through plastic surgery, cosmetics, hair style, hobbies, attitudes, etc.—completely transforms her appearance as well as her persona, we would not balk at saying, “she is a new person.” But we certainly do not mean that she is a new and different individual being.

12. 1 Corinthians 15 is one of the more useful contexts for the task of reconstructing a biblical anthropology.

13. I offer the following articulation of the biblical anthropology as a *proposal* to be considered and evaluated, not as a definitive statement that I can confidently assert. I do not believe I have given sufficient study to the matter to declare with confidence that this is the Bible’s anthropology. I am confident, however, that something along the lines of what I am

An individual human person is the being that comes into existence when the idea or concept of a particular human individual is made to express itself in and through a particular human body that has been made specifically for that purpose.

Or, using the specific terms that the New Testament sometimes employs to this end:

*An individual **psyche** (soul) is the being that comes into existence when the **pneuma** (spirit) of a particular human individual is made to express itself in and through a particular human **soma** (body)—a soma (body) that has been made specifically for that purpose.*

Or, to render this yet another way, we could represent the above with the following formula:

a **psyche** (soul) = a **pneuma** (spirit) + a **soma** (body).

Understanding Some Important Concepts

Keeping this definition of a human person in mind, we must explore the meaning of some important concepts that are employed by Paul (and others):

Spirit

When speaking of a human being, the Bible uses the word 'spirit' (pneuma) to denote the invisible, intangible *essence of a particular person*. One's spirit is that which makes a particular human person the particular individual that he is.¹⁴ It is the essence of his individuality.

Understanding the concept of a spirit in the context of God's authorship of created reality, we might arrive at this definition of "spirit"—

*The "spirit" of a particular person is the **concept** of that particular person that guides and controls God's creation of him.*

In his ongoing creation of each individual person, God works to reify or actualize a concept that he has of that person in his mind. This *concept* that God has of a person—which directs his ongoing creation of that particular individual—is what we might call the "spirit" of that person. Hence, the "spirit" of a person is everything about that person that God has conceived him to be. By its very nature, then, the "spirit" *per se* is ideal (that is, *idea-like*), and not physical, material, or spatial. My spirit is not a real, concrete thing in time and space. It is not itself a body. Neither does it have a body. It is purely and simply the idea of me in the mind of my creator.

Because the spirit (pneuma) itself is without any body, it cannot actually affect created reality. The spirit *per se* cannot be an actor within the narrative of created reality. It cannot participate in nor contribute to the ongoing march of history. If it is to make itself manifest at all, it can only do so in and through a body. In order to affect created physical reality, it must be able to manifest itself in and through something that is itself a part of created physical reality. Hence, it must have a physical body through which to manifest and express itself.

proposing here is what Paul believes. Perhaps, Paul would not articulate his anthropology in exactly the same way and in exactly the same terms as I am articulating it here. But I am quite confident that his anthropology would be substantially equivalent to what I am proposing.

14. The spirits of human beings are not interchangeable, like bodily organs might be. You could not have a spirit transplant like you have a kidney transplant. One person's spirit could not be put into another person's body with only negligible effect.

However, this is not to say that a spirit has no existence apart from a body. It can exist apart from a body. However, without a body, it cannot exist in physical space. The only way a person’s spirit can exist alone, apart from a body, is as a *concept* in the mind of God. But, as a concept in the mind of God, the spirit can exist, even when it is not associated with a body through which it can manifest itself. This has two important implications:

1. A human being can exist before he comes into existence. That is, before a person is born he can have existence (as a concept) in the mind of God.
2. After a human being dies, while he no longer has actual existence in created reality, he nonetheless has existence in the mind of God. So long as God “knows” a person, he exists. God can and will actualize him within created reality whenever he wills to do so.

But, when the spirit exists in this sense—as a concept in the mind of God—it is not able to affect, nor to participate in, the drama of created reality as a contributing player. A spirit (*pneuma*) that exists only in the mind of God is not an actualized being who is contributing to the ongoing march of history. In order to be an actualized being in this sense, the spirit would have to have a body through which to affect and interact with created reality.¹⁵

Body

The concept of a human body (*soma*) is a concept that is readily understood and relatively easy to grasp. God fashioned from the “dust of the ground” a physical, material body for the first man, Adam. It is in and through my body (*soma*) that I act, speak, think, feel, experience consciousness, and, generally, do everything that a human person can do. In and through my body I affect created reality and contribute to its narrative. Without my body, I am entirely unable to do so.¹⁶ Indeed, without my body, I have no *actual* existence.¹⁷

15. I am making a distinction between existence and actuality. If existence includes existence in the mind of God, and actuality requires having actual existence as a real actor in created reality, then my point in this section is that one can have *existence* without having *actuality*. Or, one can *exist* without being *actual*.

16. Many modern philosophers tend to take the position that it is incoherent to speak of a “person” who has no body. Only embodied “persons” can meaningfully be called persons, they argue. Therefore, any Christian doctrines that are predicated on disembodied souls, they reject as incoherent and nonsensical. They reject belief in God as a disembodied person on this very same basis. The crux of their position seems to be this: one is a person only to the extent that he is able to act in such a way that he affects reality. Without a body, one is not able to act in such a way that he affects reality. Therefore, without a body, one cannot be a person. Now if we limit ourselves to a consideration of *created* reality, the biblical worldview—as I am understanding it here—would be in agreement with these modern philosophers. In order for a person to be a person (*psyche*), he must be able to express himself in and through a physical body. However, modern philosophy is wrong to reject as meaningless the concept of a personal God who has no body. For God and humans are fundamentally different. God—unlike human beings who exist as a part of created reality—transcends created reality and is not a being within created reality. Hence, in terms of his intrinsic nature, at least, he is not an actor within the narrative of created reality. Instead, he is the *author* of the narrative of created reality. And as its author, God is fully capable of affecting created reality and changing its course from his transcendent standpoint outside of created reality. He does not need to act within created reality to affect it. Hence, *he does not need to have a body to affect it*. Why is this so? Because, from its very origin, created reality exists in and by God’s will. God did not physically fashion and mold reality. He said, “let it be so,” and it was so. In other words, created reality simply is whatever God *wills* it to be. Therefore, God needs only a mind and a will to affect reality. He does not need a body. Humans, on the other hand—by their very nature—need a body to affect created reality. So, while it is valid to say that a human person cannot be a person without a body, it is not valid to say that the divine person cannot be a person without a body. God has a fundamentally different relationship to created reality from the one human beings have.

17. I could, however, have *potential* existence without a body. I would have *potential* existence in the sense that God (in whose mind and memory my spirit [*pneuma*] resides) could, at any time he chooses, create a body through which my spirit

Soul

The concept of a human soul¹⁸ (*psyche*) is the concept of that particular human person that comes into being when a particular spirit (*pneuma*) is given a particular body through which to act, move, and manifest itself. The concept of soul (*psyche*) comes very close to our concept, in English, of an individual “person.” On the one hand, there could be no person (= soul [*psyche*]) without there being a particular spirit (*pneuma*). A spirit (*pneuma*) is required to give definition to who and what any particular person (soul [*psyche*]) is. On the other hand, there could be no person (= soul [*psyche*]) without there being a particular body through which one’s spirit (*pneuma*) acts and affects created reality. Hence—contrary to the more typical, modern understanding—the “soul” (unlike the “spirit”) is not an invisible, intangible reality. In a strictly biblical understanding, the “soul” describes a being that possesses both body and spirit. A living “soul” is a living “person”—both body and spirit.¹⁹

Relationship Between Body, Soul, and Spirit

In contrast to what many Christians tend to think, the Bible never suggests that the body, the soul, and the spirit are three metaphysical components of a human being, analogous to organs of the body.²⁰ They are not related to one another in some mechanical (or organic) cause-and-effect sort of relationship. Here is the more helpful and more accurate way to think of their interrelationship:

The spirit (pneuma) of a particular person is the complete CONCEPT of that person as an actor within the narrative of created reality. It exists in the mind and purposes of God. Hence, we could define the spirit (pneuma) of a person as the concept of a person whom God intends to actualize as an actor in the narrative of created reality.

(*pneuma*) could manifest itself. At that point, I would become actual. But, without a body, I have no *actual* existence in created reality.

18. This term proves to be one of the more confusing elements within the biblical worldview. We are accustomed to thinking of a soul as an invisible, intangible, immaterial, disembodied “person.” But we must erase that understanding from our minds if we are to understand the biblical (and Pauline) view. What **we** typically tend to label “soul,” is what the Bible (and Paul) would more likely label “spirit.” It is important to keep in mind, therefore, that, when I speak of the biblical concept of “soul,” I do not have in mind our typical understanding of this concept. The biblical concept of “soul” (in the context of biblical anthropology, at least) is not synonymous with “spirit.” However, there are numerous uses of *psyche* [sometimes translated “soul”] and *pneuma* [sometimes translated “spirit”] where the terms are synonymous and virtually interchangeable. For a list of all the different ways that *pneuma* and *psyche* are used in the New Testament, see Appendix A.
19. See *Genesis 2:7*. After describing God’s forming Adam’s body from the dust of the ground and breathing into his nostrils the breath of life, it says, “and the man became a living **soul**.”
20. Christians argue over whether the human being has two parts (body and soul) or three parts (body, soul, and spirit). It does not change anything to reduce the number of component parts to two rather than three. Whether a human is a body–soul, or a body–soul–spirit, none of these “parts” of the human being are related to one another in the mechanical or organic cause-and-effect sort of way that most Christians seem to envision. I am suggesting in this paper that the Bible treats all three—body, soul, and spirit—as discrete and meaningful parts of a human being. However, I reject any claim that they are best understood as *three metaphysical components* of a human being in a sense akin to being three organs of a human being’s body. That is the wrong way to view them.

The body (soma) of a particular person is the material, time-space organism that God creates to serve as the being in and through which God will actualize or reify his concept (spirit [pneuma]) of that particular person.

The soul (psyche) of a person, then, is the actualization of God's concept of that person in and through the body that he has created for that person.

So, while the spirit (pneuma) of a particular person can be defined as the *concept* of that person whom God has willed to actualize in created reality, the soul (psyche) of that person can be defined as *the actualization of that concept in and through the body created by God for that very purpose.*

All that is straightforward enough. However, what the Bible means by the word 'soul' can get very confusing. The Bible actually uses the word soul (psyche) in two significantly different senses. This needs some explanation:

The concept (spirit [pneuma]) of a human person is expressed or actualized in two distinct ways: (i) through the actions that are performed in and through a person's body, and (ii) through the "inner life" of that person—that is, through his thoughts, desires, intentions, beliefs, and any of the other inward, hidden realities of his mind and consciousness. But the former—his outward actions—are not altogether unconnected from his "inner life." A person's outward actions are typically a reflection of his "inner life." What he does in and through his body reflects what is happening in his "inner life."²¹ And, in general, what one does in his outward actions reflects what sort of person he is in his inner being.

Given the relationship between the inner and outer life of a person, the inner life of a person more directly reflects the sort of person that one is than does his outward behavior. One's inner life reflects the person that one is, *immediately* and *truly*. A person just is the person that is reflected by his desires, passions, urges, intentions, purposes, beliefs, commitments, etc.²² One's outward behavior reflects who one is as well, but only as it is *mediated* through, and is a true reflection of, his inner life. A person is the person that is reflected by his outward actions, but only to the extent that his outward actions are a true reflection of his inner life and we have rightly interpreted them.²³

In any event, my soul (psyche) is the expression of who I am (my spirit [pneuma]) through both the outward actions of my body and through the inner life of my mind and consciousness. That is to say, my soul includes both the person that I am as reflected in my outward actions, and the person that I am as reflected in my inward life.

This is where confusion in the Bible's use of the term can arise: sometimes the word 'soul' (psyche) is used in a narrow sense to denote the inner life of a person's consciousness *in*

21. So, for example, the person who employs his body to kill another human being is typically doing so because, in his "inner life," he is experiencing anger or hatred.

22. And he is not necessarily the person that is reflected by his outward actions. One can, by controlling his outward actions, seek to present himself as a different sort of person than he actually is. This is what the Bible calls hypocrisy, play-acting. Presenting oneself through behaviors to be a different person than he is inside.

23. See note above.

contradistinction to the outward behavior of that same person.²⁴ But, in its broadest sense (as we have seen), the denotation of the word ‘soul’ (psyche) includes *both* the inward life of a person and the outward behavior of that person.

What then is the interrelationship between spirit, soul, and body? It is simply this:

1. The spirit is the *concept* of a particular person as he is conceived by God, the author of his being. It defines everything about that person. It defines and governs his every thought and desire (and the whole of his inner life).²⁵ It defines and governs his every outward action. And it defines and governs the nature of his body. The spirit is the conception of a particular human person in exhaustive detail.
 - The soul of a person actualizes the spirit of a person. Since the soul includes both the body and the inner life of a person, it follows that both the body and the inner life of a person actualize the spirit of that person.
2. There is a priority relationship that exists between the two aspects of a person that actualize his spirit. The spirit of a person *directly and immediately* dictates the realities of the inner life of a person.²⁶ But only *indirectly* does the spirit of a person dictate the outward behaviors of a person. That is to say, a person’s outward behaviors are *mediated* by the realities of his inner life. For what one does in his body will be a reflection, one way or another, of what he wants and desires in his inner being.

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We can represent the above points briefly in the following way:

- **The SPIRIT directly governs the nature of the SOUL (in its strict, primary, and broadest sense)**

or, to say the same thing in a different way:

- **The SPIRIT directly governs**
 - **the nature of the BODY, and**
 - **the nature of the SOUL (in its secondary and more narrow sense = the INNER LIFE)**
 - which, in turn, directly governs**
 - **the OUTWARD BEHAVIOR of the BODY**

24. The word ‘body [*soma*]’ is sometimes used to denote the latter—the outward behavior, in contradistinction to the “inner life” of a person. See Appendix A.

25. This has an important implication. It is the *spirit* of a person that dictates the persons’ choices and behaviors, *not* his body. A person’s choices are *not* dictated by his genes, his DNA, his body chemistry, or by any other bodily reality. They are dictated by his “spirit.” Therefore, the biblical concept of the human spirit is incompatible with any sort of biological determinism. This does not mean, of course, that a person’s choices are not strongly influenced by the nature and state of his body. They are, or, at least, can be. But the body does not *cause* or *necessitate* a person’s choices. A person is always free to resist the pressures exerted by his physical condition; and he will do so if it is in his “spirit” to do so—that is, if God’s concept of him so dictates.

26. Strictly speaking, the the spirit also *directly* dictates the nature of one’s body. And by the “nature of the body” here I mean this: God, who has conceived of exactly what person I am, has, among other things, conceived of exactly what body I will have. God has created everything about my body. He has created its virtues and its lacks. He has created its weaknesses, its imperfections, its proclivities. Everything about my physical being is a direct result of who God created me to be. And who God created me to be is governed by his preconception of me before created reality began—that is, by my “spirit.”

The Varying States in Which a Human Being Might Find Himself

Based on various statements that Paul makes in the New Testament, one can attempt to reconstruct what he understands to be the various anthropological states in which human individuals might find themselves at various stages of their lives and history. Here is my proposal for what Paul believes in this regard:

1. The spirit of each and every human being is a creation of God; it was designed before the creation of reality. Each human being's spirit is the concept of that particular person as God had conceived him before the beginning of created reality.²⁷
 - In all likelihood, Paul understood God's conception of each individual person to contain the entire history of that person. God's concept of me includes everything I will ever do and everything I will ever be.²⁸
2. A human being is actualized and becomes an actual person (a living soul) when he is born. Through the process of gestation and birth, God creates the body that he has designed for that person—the particular body in and through which his particular spirit will express itself and make manifest who he is within created reality.²⁹
3. When a human being dies, his body decays and is no longer able to function. It can no longer express the identity of that human being's spirit. His consciousness *ceases*. At the point of death, therefore, the human being ceases to be an actual person. And he continues to be non-existent as an actual person until such time as he is resurrected.³⁰
4. For the duration of time after an individual's death, when he is not an actual person, a human being continues to exist as a concept in the mind of God.
 - My "spirit" (which ultimately is nothing more than the concept of me in the mind of God, and is not itself a conscious being) is fully grasped and remembered by God. When I am dead, while I cease have any actual existence in created reality, I remain a viable concept in the mind of God.³¹

27. See *Galatians* 1:15, *Jeremiah* 1:5, and *Isaiah* 49:1, 5. While these passages do not assert this point explicitly, they clearly express ideas that are compatible with it. Indeed, it is arguable that what they do assert actually entails the point being expressed here. Note also the implications of *Romans* 9:19–24.

28. The German philosopher Leibniz famously concluded that if Caesar had not crossed the Rubicon, then he wouldn't have been Caesar. That is, if his history had been a different history, then he would have been a different person. According to Leibniz, the concept of each individual person includes that person's entire predetermined history, down to the smallest detail. In my judgment, Paul's (and the Bible's) view is essentially the same as Leibniz's view. One of the things contained in God's concept of an individual is whether he will believe in Jesus and be saved or reject the truth about Jesus and be condemned. Or, to use Paul's terminology from *Romans* 9:21–24, whether he will be a "vessel of wrath created for destruction" or a "vessel of mercy created for glory."

29. See *Psalms* 139:13 and *Job* 31:15.

30. See *Acts* 13:36–37. Paul's argument here is this: David, after fulfilling his purpose, died ("fell asleep"), was laid in his tomb, and his body underwent decay. David is no longer with us. But Jesus was soon raised from the dead after he died (before his body could undergo decay). So, while Jesus was raised to immortality after his death, David stayed dead, inert in his tomb and without any actual existence. It follows from these facts that it is Jesus (the son of David), and not David himself, who is the locus of all that God promised to David.

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- In the Bible, a very common way to state that a person has died is to say that “he sleeps.” According to the biblical view of death, therefore, sleep is an apt analogy.³² In sleep, a person is temporarily inactive and unconscious. That is totally consistent with the biblical view of death. For in the biblical view of death, the dead individual is only temporarily inactive and unconscious. Granted, there is also a “second death” as part of the biblical worldview. In the “second death” the individual is totally destroyed and ceases to exist for all eternity.³³ But, in the ordinary sense of death (the “first death” as it were), one is not yet totally destroyed; he is not yet permanently gone. Before all has come to an end, the person who has died (his “first death”) will be “awakened” from death. In one way or another—and for one reason or another—the dead individual will be re-actualized in order to further play out his role in the narrative of created reality.
 - The traditional Christian view is that, after an individual dies, his “soul” (or, perhaps, his “spirit”) goes to heaven or to hell.³⁴ At this point the traditional view becomes somewhat muddled and confused. Sometimes Christians speak as if—from the point of death onward—the “soul” experiences either eternal bliss in heaven or eternal torment in hell. But at other times they seem to acknowledge that the dead will be raised from their grave at the return of Jesus. How do they reconcile these two beliefs? Presumably, they are thinking that, at the resurrection, there is a union of the human being’s disembodied soul (which had been waiting in heaven for the time of Jesus’ return to earth) with a new body. In any event—however one puts the traditional picture together—it is not consistent with what the Bible actually teaches. The strictly biblical view is the one described in the note immediately above. Namely, before we are raised from the dead, we are kept as concepts in the mind of God.
 - * The traditional Christian view of what happens after death is not in harmony with the Bible’s drawing an analogy between death and sleep. Under the traditional Christian view (where one’s disembodied soul continues to exist), why would one say of a dead person, “he sleeps.” The disembodied soul of the person in heaven (or in hell) is fully aware, is fully conscious, and is as fully active as an existence in heaven or hell permits. Hence, there is no significant analogy to sleep in that view. The fact that the Bible draws an analogy between death and sleep, therefore, poses a significant challenge to the traditional Christian view that one’s disembodied soul continues to experience a conscious existence after death (before one is raised from the dead).

31. It is this perspective that would seem to underlie both Jesus’ and Stephen’s words at their respective deaths: “into your hands I commit my *spirit*” and “Lord Jesus! Receive my spirit.” See *Luke 23:46* and *Acts 7:59*. In effect, both Jesus and Stephen are saying, “God, I am trusting you to remember me (in order to re-actualize me at the appropriate time).”

32. See *John 11:11-17*. There are a number of other references where death is referred to as “falling asleep” and the dead as “being asleep.”

33. The “second death” is the death to which every human being is justly condemned because of his sinfulness. It is the death that the Jesus-believer will escape, by the mercy of God, on account of Jesus’ intercession. Hence, only those who do not belong to Jesus will experience the “second death.” See *Revelation 20:6, 20:14, and 21:8*.

34. See note 45.

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5. If a person who “belongs to Jesus”³⁵ has died before Jesus returns, then, at the return of Jesus, he is resurrected. At his resurrection, God gives him a new, immortal body through which his spirit will henceforth express itself.³⁶ He becomes an actual person (a living soul) once again. But, this time, he becomes an eternal, immortal person; an eternal, immortal soul.³⁷
 6. If a person who “belongs to Jesus” is alive when Jesus returns, then he will be raised up into the sky to meet the returning Jesus. As he does so, he will be instantaneously transformed. He will be given a new, immortal body through which his spirit will henceforth express itself. (This is the same transformation that is experienced by the dead who belong to Jesus at Jesus’ return.) He will become an eternal, immortal person; an eternal, immortal soul.³⁸
 7. In his new eternal, immortal state, the one who belongs to Jesus will interact with mortal, sinful human beings within history during the period of Jesus’ kingly reign over Israel and the world.³⁹
 8. During the millennial reign of Jesus, mortal human beings will continue to be born and come into existence. Presumably, some of them will “belong to Jesus.”⁴⁰ To my knowledge, the Bible does not lay out the timing and sequence of any events that these millennial saints might experience. It is possible that, upon their death, they will be immediately transformed into the eternal, immortal person that they shall be forever (a being like all the others who belonged to Jesus before them). Or, it is equally possible that they will remain in their grave until the final end of history when, all together, in one climactic event, they are transformed into their immortal state (an event that amounts to a sort of second “rapture” of Jesus-believers). But, to my knowledge, there is no indication of any such event anywhere in the Bible.
 9. At the very end of the present created order—after history and the age of the kingly reign of Jesus have reached their conclusion—every individual throughout history who did not belong

35. he one who “belongs to Jesus” is the one who has been predestined to eternal life from before the foundation of the earth.

36. Note that, in the light of Luke 20:34–36, we can reasonably believe that the new body that we Jesus-believers receive at the resurrection will not procreate. (To compose a complete argument from Luke 20:34–36 in support of this contention is beyond the scope of this paper.) Presumably, therefore, our new body will be asexual. However, from the fact that our bodies will be asexual, it does not follow that we will be neither male nor female in the resurrection. Arguably, our sexuality (our maleness or femaleness) is so fundamental to who we are as human beings that it makes sense to speak of a “spirit” as male or female (assuming the concept of “spirit” that we have proposed in this paper). If that is the case, then our new eternal souls will be either male or female, even though our bodies will be asexual.

37. See *1 Corinthians* 15:50–53.

38. See *1 Thessalonians* 4:13–18, especially verse 17, in the light of *1 Corinthians* 15:50–57, especially verses 51–52.

39. Namely, the time typically known as the millennium. As outlandish as this might sound, it is not without a clear precedent. Isn’t this exactly what Jesus did after his resurrection? Did not the eternal, immortal Jesus walk down the road to Emmaus, teaching two sinful, mortal men? Even if one argues that Jesus had not, at that point, been given his eternal, immortal body, yet, nevertheless, he had clearly begun his eternal existence. Hence, in the road-to-Emmaus event, the eternal human being Jesus was interacting with two ordinary, mortal men. Note the following passages: *Luke* 22:28–30, *2 Timothy* 2:12, and *Revelation* 1:6, 5:9–10, 20:66. It would appear that those who belong to Jesus will “co-reign” with Jesus during his millennial reign.

40. See note 35.

to Jesus (and did not truly believe in him) will be judged, sentenced, and punished by God for the things he did during his existence. Unless he happens to have survived the final events and is alive when the time for final judgment comes, he will be brought out of his grave and returned to actual existence (that is, he will be resurrected) in order to face judgment and recompense in the context of his re-actualized existence.⁴¹

10. After the end of this present created order—and presumably after God has exacted retribution for every unrighteous deed committed by every condemned person—God will destroy the present “heavens and earth” in order to replace it with an entirely new created order (a “new heavens and a new earth”). If any *mortal* human beings still remain in this present created reality at that particular time, they will be totally and absolutely destroyed in and with the destruction of the present created order.⁴²

- After his just, fair, and proportional punishment has been brought to completion, the individual who does not belong to Jesus will be destroyed. Not only is such an individual’s body destroyed, but—in all likelihood—so is his spirit (the very concept of him in the mind of God).⁴³

- * Either God totally eliminates from his own mind the concept of who that individual is (= the complete destruction of his spirit), or—at the very least—God commits himself to never again actualizing the concept of that individual in created reality (= the complete banishment of his spirit from actual existence). Either way, that individual’s spirit (concept) will never again have any actual existence in the future. That individual is gone, and gone forever.

11. When, at the end, God destroys the present created order and replaces it with an entirely new creation (a new heavens and a new earth), each and every individual who belongs to Jesus—taken from the whole span of history—will dwell forever in that new created order. His existence will be an embodied existence (in a new, more glorious body), and his existence will be eternal, immortal, righteous (entirely free of sin), glorious, and rewarding. Beyond these few facts, one cannot even imagine how wonderful Life in the eternal age will be, nor what it will be like.⁴⁴

Reflections on Other Relevant Passages

One way to test my proposal for the biblical theory of the nature of mankind (biblical anthropology) is to see whether my proposal can make sense of the way the relevant terms are used elsewhere in the Bible. As a test of my proposal, let us consider five other passages where

41. He will not be resurrected to eternal, immortal existence, for that is not his destiny. So it is not the same sort of resurrection that Jesus-believers had already experienced. It is a resurrection in the sense that he is brought back into existence (like Jesus’ friend Lazarus was), not in the sense that he is raised to immortality. See *Revelation* 20:11–15.

42. See *Revelation* 20:11–21:1. Presumably, if any mortals who belong to Jesus do perchance exist at the time the world is about to be destroyed, they will be instantaneously “transformed” into the same eternal, immortal state that has been granted to all other individuals who belong to Jesus.

43. See *Psalms* 92:7.

44. See *Revelation* 21:1–8, *Romans* 8:18–27, *2 Corinthians* 4:17.

the terms "soul" and/or "spirit" are used, to see whether, in each case, my analysis of these concepts can make sense out of the statement being made.

Matthew 10:28

In *Matthew* 10:28, Jesus is seeking to encourage his disciples not to fear what other human beings might do to them. He says, "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (NASV) The New American Standard Version gives us a rather tendentious translation here. The Greek text does not speak of "hell." It reads, "fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in *Gehenna*." *Gehenna* refers to the pile of burning garbage located in the Valley of Hinnom, outside the gates of Jerusalem. It was the garbage dump for the city.⁴⁵

What does Jesus mean to suggest when he identifies those who are able to kill the body but are "unable to kill the soul"? Contrary to traditional assumptions, he is not suggesting that the soul is an immortal entity.⁴⁶ What, then, is he suggesting? Strictly speaking—given my proposal with regard to what the soul actually is—to kill the body *necessarily entails* killing the soul. For if the body is destroyed, so is the soul. So, how can Jesus suggest the possibility of a body being destroyed where the soul is not?

In order to understand how Jesus is viewing this, we must remember that—as I suggested above—the Bible speaks of *two* deaths, a first death and a second death. The first death does *not* involve the total destruction of the soul (the person) of an individual. When an individual dies, he ceases to have an actual, active presence in created reality. However, while he may not have any actual, active presence in created reality for a certain period of time, the possibility of his being restored to an active presence in created reality has not been foreclosed upon. God could, at any time he chose to do so, resurrect (re-create) him and thereby restore him to an actual, active presence in created reality. The *second death*, on the other hand, is an entirely different matter. If one undergoes the second death, there is no coming back. There is no possibility of his ever having any actual, active presence in created reality again. His actual existence will never again be restored. In other words, never again will one be granted a "living soul."

In the light of this, when another man kills my body, he has caused me to experience *the first death*. And while he has, in fact, destroyed my soul for the time being, he has not foreclosed on the possibility of my soul being restored. But when God "destroys both my soul and body in

45. Hence, *Gehenna* does not represent torment and torture. It represents destruction. The fires of *Gehenna* are an incinerator, not a torture chamber. (Note that the text speaks of *destroying* both body and soul in *Gehenna*, *not punishing* both body and soul in *Gehenna*.) The same can be said for the "lake of fire" in *Revelation*. It too represents an incinerator, not a mode of torture. (Note that the abstract realities of death and Hades [the grave] are thrown into the "lake of fire." [See *Rev.* 20:14] The point being made is that these abstractions are being *destroyed* and *eliminated* from reality, not that they are being tortured. How does one torture an abstraction?) The traditional concept of hell as a place of eternal torment is not a biblical teaching. The Bible *does* teach that there will be retribution for the deeds that a person has done—unless, because of Jesus, he is extended mercy instead. (See e.g., *Rom.* 2:3–11.) But, unlike the traditional view of hell as *eternal* torment and *eternal* punishment, the Bible teaches that God's retribution will be just, fair, and proportional. (The punishment will fit the crime.) Hence, it follows that it cannot be "eternal." This explains why the majority of texts that describe the destiny of the unrighteous and unbelieving identify their end as *destruction*, not punishment. Once God's just punishment has been exacted, the unbeliever is erased, never to exist again. His *complete negation* is the ultimate outcome of his rebellion and unbelief.

46. This was the view of Plato and many of the early Christians who were influenced by him.

Gehenna," he is bringing to pass *the second death*.⁴⁷ And by his so doing, he is foreclosing on the possibility of my soul ever again being restored. If it is destroyed in Gehenna, the soul is destroyed forever, never again to return. For Gehenna represents the final and absolute destruction of a human being's soul.

Now we are in a position to see clearly the point that Jesus is making in this passage. One should not fear other human beings. While they can kill my body and cause me to undergo the "first death," there is no further harm that they can do to me.⁴⁸ The one to fear is God. He is the one who has the power and authority to bring about the absolute and final destruction of my soul (the "second death"), erasing the possibility of my ever again being an actual, active person. Therefore, God is the one I must seek to please. It is of no ultimate consequence whether other human beings are pleased with me. But it is of the utmost consequence whether God is pleased with me.

James 2:26

In *James 2:26*, James writes, "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." (NASV) James is creating an analogy between the human person and authentic saving belief. Just as a body that gives no evidence that a spirit is expressing itself through it is nothing but an inert corpse, so likewise a claim to believe the gospel that gives no evidence that the belief is actually expressing itself through works is nothing but an empty and inert claim.

What is significant about James analogy here—for our purposes—is how it seems to confirm our analysis of the biblical anthropology. In his analogy, James seems to presuppose that a living soul (an actual, active, living person) results from a body being the medium wherein a spirit gives expression to the person that he is. This is precisely the analysis of a human being that we have proposed in this paper. It seems clear, therefore, that Jesus is employing the terms "body" and "soul" in this passage in a manner that is perfectly in line with our proposal for what is the anthropology of the Bible.

1 Corinthians 5:3–4

We find the following in *1 Corinthians 5:3–4*:

"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. In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus..." (NASV)

In this statement, Paul employs the concept of being absent in body from the Corinthians while being present with them in spirit. What exactly is this concept?

What Paul means by being "absent in body" seems clear enough. He simply means that his physical body (which occupies space) is not located in Corinth. It is across the sea, in Ephesus.

47. That is what the reference to Gehenna is specifically intended to suggest.

48. That is, while they can kill my body, they are unable to *finally* and *absolutely* destroy my soul.

But what does he mean when he tells them that he is “with them in spirit” (or, is “present in spirit”)?

We are all aware of the phenomenon wherein the things that occupy my mind are the things that are most immediately present around me. I am not typically concerned about people and events that are physically far removed from me. My concerns are attracted to the things that are physically close to me. The Corinthians, therefore, could have every reason to expect that Paul, having relocated to Ephesus, is no longer thinking of them in Corinth. Paul’s point in this text is to tell them otherwise. He *is*, in fact, thinking of them. They *do* frequently come to mind. For he is vitally concerned about them and their well-being. How does he express that? By telling them that he is “present with them in spirit.”

In this phrase Paul is using the word “spirit” in a specific sense—in a sense that is not intended to describe something about his ontology as a human being. He is using it to denote his inward consciousness, specifically, his thoughts, attitudes, and concerns—the occupations of his mind.⁴⁹ Hence, to be “present with them in spirit” means to be present in his thoughts and concerns. And what does that mean? Paul is actively concerned for the Corinthians’ well-being—especially for their sanctification and salvation. His thoughts and concerns for them are of a nature and extent that you would expect if he were physically present among them. Or, in a kind of shorthand, his “thoughts and concerns are present with them.” In other words, when Paul says, “I am with you in spirit,” he means, “I am with you in my thoughts and concerns.”

Paul does not use the word *pneuma* (spirit) here in a context that concerns that is concerned with anthropology in any way. Hence, it has no implications, one way or another, about our theory of the nature of a human being. But nothing Paul says here creates any difficulties for the anthropology I have been proposing in this paper.

1 Corinthians 5:5

In 1 Corinthians 5:5 we find Paul’s verdict: “*I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*” (NASV) Paul’s point here can be restated like this:

I have decided that it would be best to allow this man, who seems to have believed the deceitful lies of Satan, to destroy his own body, as he lives out the implications of those Satanic lies, so that God might get his attention and ultimately rescue him from God’s wrath at the time of judgment.

Of what does God’s wrath toward unbelievers in the day of the Lord Jesus consist? It consists of the “second death”—the final, absolute destruction of the person that God has conceived him to be. In other words, it consists of the absolute destruction of his *spirit*.⁵⁰ Hence, to be delivered from judgment on the “day of the Lord Jesus” is clearly tantamount to having one’s “spirit saved.”

49. See meaning #7 under “Uses of *Pneuma* in the New Testament” in Appendix A.

50. Note, however, that if we said here “the final, absolute destruction of his *soul*,” we would be saying essentially the same thing.

Once again, it seems clear that Paul is employing the term "spirit" in this passage in a manner that is perfectly in line with our proposal for what is the anthropology of the Bible. Furthermore, Paul seems to employ the word 'flesh' as a synonym for 'body.' And he uses the term "flesh" in a manner that is consistent with our proposal for a biblical anthropology.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

Judging whether 1 Thessalonians 5:23 supports our proposed theory regarding the nature of a human person will depend on how we translate it. In the Greek it reads:

Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης ἀγιάσαι ὑμᾶς ὀλοτελεῖς, καὶ ὀλόκληρον ὑμῶν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἀμέμπτως ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τηρηθεῖη.

My translation of this statement would read like this:

Now may the God of shalom himself sanctify you completely. Indeed, may your spirit be kept sound, and your soul and body kept blameless, at the time of our lord Jesus the Messiah's visitation.

When we understand Paul's statement in the way that I have rendered it above, it is completely compatible with our theory of the human person. Whether I will be blameless with regard to what I do with my body and with regard to what I do with my soul is completely dependent upon whether my "spirit" is sound. My spirit (the deep-down, essential person that God is creating me to be) is what ultimately governs what I do, what I desire, what I think, and everything else that comes out of me. If *doing* something wrong defiles my body, and if *wanting, thinking, believing, feeling, or intending* something wrong defiles my soul (the inner life of the actual person who exists in this world), then the defilement of my body and of my soul is ultimately the result of some moral or spiritual unsoundness in my spirit (the essential concept of me as a human individual). Paul's expressed desire for these Thessalonians, therefore, is that God would keep their spirits⁵¹ sound so that, *as a result*, they might remain blameless in what they do outwardly (that is, that their *bodies* might remain blameless) as well as in what they "do" in their inner persons (that is, that their *souls*⁵² might remain blameless).

Careful thought to what Paul is saying here will lead one to conclude that what Paul is saying here is completely compatible with the view of human nature that I have proposed in this paper.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper I have examined the nature (and the story) of existence after death as that is discussed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul's description of existence after death presupposes a specific understanding of the nature of a human being (that is, a specific anthropology). Traditional Christianity presupposes an anthropology that differs from Paul's. As a consequence, it embraces a very different understanding of the nature of existence after death.

51. See meaning #8 under "Uses of Pneuma in the New Testament" in Appendix A. This meaning best represents how Paul is using the word *pneuma* here.

52. See meaning #6 under "Uses of Psyche in the New Testament" in Appendix A. This meaning best represents how Paul is using the word *psyche* here.

Traditional Christianity believes that a human being is an immortal soul dwelling in a mortal body. Hence, upon death, the immortal soul must exist somewhere. Traditional Christianity proposes that it exists either in heaven or in hell. While its view of life after death follows logically from its own anthropology, it is totally inconsistent with what Paul teaches in 1 *Corinthians* 15. Hence, neither its view of the nature of a human being nor its view of existence after death is truly biblical.⁵³

We can summarize what we have come to understand what the Bible would teach with regard to the ontology of a human being and the facts of existence after death this way:

- Before the world was even created, God formed an idea of each individual human person P. God’s idea of person P included the entire history of P, and an idea of how P’s history was connected to every other thing that would ever come to be. God’s invisible, intangible idea of person P is essentially what the Bible calls the “*spirit*” of person P. At a preconceived point in history, God gave concrete expression to the idea that he had formed of P by creating a *body* in and through which P would give expression to who he is (and who God had conceived him to be). Being born into created reality with a human body, P became an actual human person—or, what the Bible calls a “*soul*.”
- When person P dies, he ceases to exist as an actual person—that is, his *soul* ceases to exist. His *body* becomes a dead corpse and his *spirit* ceases to have any actual active presence anywhere in created reality. P’s *spirit* does, however, continue to exist in the mind of its author, God.
- When Jesus returns to establish his kingdom on earth, if a person P (who belongs to Jesus) has already died, God will raise him out of his grave and restore him to actual existence in created reality by creating for him a new and wholly different sort of body—an eternal, immortal one. If person P is alive when Jesus returns, God will simply raise him into the air and, as he does so, will transform him into an entirely new person by giving him a new and wholly different—eternal and immortal—body as well.
- Beyond created reality, and for all eternity, those who belong to Jesus will exist forever as actual persons who given expression to who they are (and to whom God conceived them to be) in and through the new bodies that they will receive in connection with Jesus’ return.

The above picture of what happens after death (and the anthropology that underlies it) ought to be the standard account among Bible-believing Christians. But it is not. The standard picture is that my immortal soul leaves my body and goes to heaven after I die. Such a picture of an immortal soul leaving the body and going to heaven is *not taught anywhere in the Bible*. Nowhere does the Bible envision a disembodied existence for any human being at any time. And nowhere does the Bible teach that any human being will ever go to heaven (to be with God). The believer’s future hope is always and consistently portrayed as a bodied existence in a whole new creation, with a wholly new and different body, where neither evil nor death have any place.⁵⁴

53. Strictly speaking, what I have shown is that traditional Christianity’s anthropology and beliefs about existence after death do not line up with Paul’s beliefs. However, I maintain that a thorough examination of the entire Bible—New Testament and Old Testament—would reveal a consistent story throughout about the ontological structure of a human being as well as about what happens after death. To be specific, it would support the story that we have discovered underlying Paul’s discussion in 1 *Corinthians* 15.

Finally, all of this has a very important implication that is well worth noting: *I am not my body*. My body is the context within which the personal, spiritual being that I am expresses itself. But it is *not* WHO I am. I will be given a new and different body. WHO I am is the personal being whom God determined that I would be before the foundation of the world. WHO I am is the protagonist in a never-ending story that is uniquely mine—a story that will span the transition between this present created reality and the new one to come.

54. The discrepancy between what the Bible *clearly* and *unmistakably* teaches on these matters and what Christians typically believe about these matters is highly revealing. It shows us the power of religion and culture to control what we think and believe. Most Christians prefer the comfort of their religious worldview to the Truth revealed in the Bible. No amount of reasoning and argumentation can move them away from the doctrines of their Christian religion in order that they might embrace the actual teaching of the Bible. But if those who belong to Jesus (and are destined to eternal life) are children of Truth—as I believe they are—then Jesus' warning about how narrow is the road to eternal Life is a warning that we must certainly give heed to. It is not remaining comfortably and safely Christian that marks one as a follower of Jesus. The follower of Jesus is the one who follows Jesus to wherever the Truth itself lies.

Appendix A

Uses of *Pneuma* in the New Testament

Here are the various ways that the Greek word pneuma [πνεῦμα] is used in the New Testament [not every occurrence is cited]:

1. *Pneuma* can denote the “spirit” of a specific human being, which is to say, it can denote the essential, defining identity of that particular individual human being. (The “presence” of one’s defining essence marks the person as actual existing as that specific individual; its absence marks his no longer existing as that specific individual.)
 - *Matt. 27:50; Luke 8:55; Luke 23:46; John 19:30; Acts 7:59; 1 Cor. 5:5; James 4:5.*
2. *Pneuma* can denote the element that is essential to making a human being a human being in general. (Its “presence” marks the fact that one has actual existence as a human being and is actively participating in created reality; its absence marks one’s no longer being an actual person who is active in created reality.)
 - *Heb. 12:9; Heb. 12:23.*
3. *Pneuma* can denote the disembodied state of a deceased human being (= a ghost). [No such thing ever actually exists. When one speaks of a *pneuma* in this sense, he is reflecting a superstitious folk belief. It is *not* a belief that is actually supported by the biblical worldview.]
 - *Luke 24:37; Luke 24:39; John 19:30.*
4. *Pneuma* can denote any invisible, intangible, not-embodied personal being who is not a human being, hence ...
 - *pneuma* can denote the invisible person that is *God himself*.
 - * Some of the various references to “the Holy Spirit” or “the Spirit” have this sense. See e.g., *John 4:24; Revelation 2:7,11,17.*
 - *pneuma* can denote various invisible, non-human personal beings created by God (most notably, *unclean spirits, angels, etc.*)
 - * *Matt. 8:16; Matt. 10:1; Heb. 1:14.*
5. *Pneuma* can denote the person of God—more narrowly and specifically—as the personal divine being who, through his invisible, intangible activity, makes himself known through the knowable effects of his activity within created reality. (That is, by denoting God as the one who is immanent and active in making himself known within created reality [the Spirit of God] in contradistinction to the one who transcends all of created reality and is unknowable in his transcendence [God].)
 - * Most of the references to “the Spirit of God” or “the Spirit” have this sense. See e.g., *Matt. 3:16; Matt. 10:20; Matt. 12:18; Matt. 12:28; Matt. 22:43.* Many of the references to “the Holy Spirit” have this sense. See e.g., *Matt. 1:18; Matt. 28:19.*
6. *Pneuma* can denote the inward experience of a human being, specifically the person’s psycho-emotional experience.

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- *Mark 8:12; Luke 1:47; John 11:33; John 13:21; Acts 17:16; Rom. 8:15 (2); 1 Cor. 16:18; 2 Cor. 2:13; 2 Cor. 7:13.*
7. *Pneuma* can denote the inward intellectual functioning and/or consciousness of a human being, specifically, the person's conscious awareness, perception, thought, reasoning, or attitude—even the person's self-concept.
 - *Matt. 5:3; Mark 2:8; John 4:23-24 (?); Rom. 8:16; 1 Cor. 2:11; 1 Cor. 5:3-4; 1 Cor. 14:2; 1 Cor. 14:14-16; 1 Cor. 14:32; Col. 2:5; Revelation 22:6.*
 8. *Pneuma* can denote the locus of a human being's moral or spiritual character—that is, it can denote that aspect of a human person to which various moral or spiritual character traits can be ascribed.
 - *Luke 1:17; John 3:6; John 4:23-24 (?); Acts 18:25 (?); Acts 20:22 (?); Rom. 1:4; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 2:12; 1 Cor. 4:21; 1 Cor. 7:34; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 1:17; 2 Tim. 1:7; Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 3:4.*
 9. *Pneuma* can denote the locus of a person's existential commitments.
 - *Matt. 26:41; Mark 14:38; Acts 18:25 (?); Acts 20:22 (?); Rom. 1:9.*
 10. *Pneuma* can denote the essential message conveyed by some verbal communication, that is, its meaning and/or significance.
 - *Rev. 19:10.*
 11. *Pneuma* can denote the moral or spiritual origin or wellspring of a teaching or doctrine or the moral or spiritual significance to a teaching or doctrine.
 - *1 Cor. 12:10; 1 John 4:1-6.*
 12. *Pneuma* can denote some current of air; hence, it can denote either wind or breath.
 - *John 3:8; 2 Thess. 2:8; Heb. 1:7; Rev. 11:11.*
 13. *Pneuma* can denote a powerful, invisible, intangible force that can and does impact created reality and/or the inner lives of human beings, especially the powerful force of culture.
 - *Eph. 2:2.*

Uses of Psyche in the New Testament

Here are the various ways that the Greek word psyche [ψύχη] is used in the New Testament [not every occurrence is cited]:

1. *Psyche* can denote an actual living, animated human person (whether it is a person who currently exists or a person who exists at some other point in time).
 - *Matt. 10:28; Matt. 20:28; Matt. 22:37; Mark 8:36–37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27; Luke 12:19; Luke 12:23; Luke 21:19; Acts 2:27; Acts 2:41; Acts 3:23; Acts 4:32; Acts 7:14; Acts 27:37; Rom. 13:1; 2 Cor. 12:15; Heb. 6:19; Heb. 10:39; Heb. 13:17; James 1:21; James 5:20; 1 Peter 1:9; 1 Peter 2:25; 1 Peter 3:20; 1 Peter 4:19; Jude 15; Rev. 6:9; Rev. 18:13; Rev. 20:4.*

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2. *Psyche* can denote the “life” of a human being—that is, his existence in a state of biological viability in contradistinction to a state of being dead.
 - *Matt. 2:20; Mark 3:4; Mark 10:45; Luke 6:9; Luke 12:20; John 10:11, 15,17; John 13:37–38; John 15:13; Acts 15:26; Acts 20:10; Acts 27:10, 22; Rom. 11:3; Rom. 16:4; Phil. 2:30; 1 John 3:16.*
 3. *Psyche* can denote the person of God himself.
 - *Matt. 12:18; Heb. 10:38.*
 4. *Psyche* can denote any non-human living creature.
 - *Rev. 8:9; Rev. 16:3.*
 5. *Psyche* can denote the substance of the existence of a human being—what he does, what he accomplishes, what he acquires, his time, energy, resources, etc. (This meaning is often used prospectively, indicating the substance of a human individual’s existence that lies before him as a hope and expectation.)
 - *Matt. 6:25; Matt. 10:39; Matt. 16:25-26; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; Luke 12:22; Luke 14:26; Luke 17:33; John 12:25; Acts 20:24; Phil. 2:30; 1 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 12:11.*
 6. *Psyche* can denote the inward realities of a human individual’s existence (namely, his inner intellectual, psychological, and emotional realities), in contradistinction to the outward actions and behavior of that human individual.
 - *2 Cor. 1:23; Eph. 6:6; Col. 3:23; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 Peter 2:11; 2 Peter 2:8; 2 Peter 2:14; 3 John 2.*
 7. *Psyche* can denote that aspect of an individual human person who experiences various psycho-emotional events.
 - *Matt. 11:29; Matt. 26:38; Mark 14:34; Luke 1:46; John 10:24; John 12:27; Acts 2:43; Acts 14:2; Acts 15:24; Rom. 2:9; Rev. 18:14.*
 8. *Psyche* can denote the inner life of a human person as defined by his existential commitments.
 - *Acts 14:22; Phil. 1:27; Heb. 6:19; Heb. 12:3.*
 9. *Psyche* can denote the persona of a person—that is, the person as he “presents” himself to others outside of him, in contradistinction to the real, actual person that he is, as defined by his actual existential commitments.
 - *Luke 2:35; Heb. 4:12.*