

1 Corinthians 15:39-41

PREFACE

It seems appropriate to preface our study of vv39-41 by reading, once again, an earlier passage in this letter.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:13-16.

In that passage the apostle Paul makes the very important statement: “The body is...for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.” Paul goes on to express the importance of the human, earthly body in vv19-20:

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

I’ll not repeat all that I’ve said about how many in the Corinth church perceived the fleshly, human body; we have covered that several times before. Let it suffice that they saw the human body as being utterly unspiritual, worthy only of being discarded at death—and good riddance.

Back in Chapter Six, however, Paul was saying, *No, no, God has a use for the earthly body*. He places His own Holy Spirit in that body to sanctify it, and as a promise—an earnest—of what is to come for the believer. Then he concludes with the command to bring glory to God “*in [or with] your body!*” Remarkable. The Corinthians said, *Nah, the earthly body, the flesh, means nothing: do whatever you want with it, and when we die it just rots in the ground*. No, God has a use for this body.

Now in our current passage, he will extend this concept by stating that bodies of all sorts—even heavenly bodies—possess a glory of a sort.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:38-41.

v39

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

In the previous passage the apostle employed an *agricultural* example to illustrate his point regarding the resurrection body: the planted seed “dies,” then is “raised” with a new body—its *own* body, just as God desired. And I used the illustration of a kernel of corn; you plant that kernel of corn and it “dies”: it sprouts roots and is “raised” above ground in a brand new body that looks nothing like that original kernel.

Here now, to make his point further, he presents “different kinds of terrestrial flesh and different kinds of brilliance among celestial bodies” (Garland). and perhaps you noticed, when the passage was read, all the repetition. There are three key words in this passage which, by their repetition, emphasize its message:

flesh (*sarx*): used five times in v39;

another (*alle & hetera*): used six times in vv39-41;

glory (*doxa*): used six times in vv40-41.

We’re not here to count words, but repetition in God’s word serves to drive home the point of a passage. Any time you are reading God’s word and a word or two is repeated, take note of that, and ask yourself why? The Corinthians fear that resurrection means something like a reanimated corpse; since v35 Paul has been employing various imagery to get them to understand that resurrection means that flesh is changed to something different (“another”).

We also need not get lost in the minutia of differences and the hierarchical positioning of the various species listed in v39. Down here on terra firma “flesh” takes on various forms: for different species and genii, the “body” is different from others—it is “another” (*alle*, another of the same sort).

Read John 14:16. (Jesus speaking)

Here Jesus says that the one to be sent—another—will be different from Him, but one *like Him*: the Holy Spirit. But then in v40 Paul uses a different Greek word translated “another.” And now we can see where he is going with this.

v40

There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another.

In this context the word “glory” (*doxa*) can mean “radiance.” Earthly bodies have a certain inherent radiance, and heavenly bodies do as well. Both have a measure of radiance—but between the earthly and the heavenly that radiance is different: “another.” Here it is the Greek *hetera*, another of a different sort. *Alle* (v39) is one of the *same* sort; Jesus, Holy Spirit: same sort, same genus, as it were. Here it is the Greek *hetera*.

Although the meaning is getting lost in this “woke” generation, there are men and there are women: each is a different sort from the other—no matter what they think in this culture, no matter what society says, man is different from woman. A man who prefers to lie with a woman, or a woman who prefers to lie with a man, is called a *heterosexual*—another of a *different* sort. Human being, but very different.

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

When we gaze into the night sky with our naked eyes we perceive the difference between the radiance of the moon from that of the sun, and the radiance of the stars is different from both of those. We don't require a telescope to reveal that. Nevertheless, that difference is another of the *same* sort (*alle*)—a difference of degrees, not kind. All these bodies dwell not on earth but in the heavens, so their radiance is *hetera* from the bodies of living beings on earth, but *alle* to each other. That is, in English, these bodies dwell in the heavens, so their radiance is *another of a different sort* from the bodies of living beings on earth, but *another of the same sort* to each other.

Notice, however, that while a certain “glory” is assigned to both those on earth and those in the heavens, note how for those on earth, in v39, he uses the word *sarx* (flesh) to describe the container for that glory, but for those in the heavens, in v41, the container *is* that glory. Here Paul subtly broaches the reality of the resurrected “glorified” body. In heaven, we will not have *flesh* that is glorified; we will just have glory. What an amazing thought!

Note too that—just as our naked eyes tell us—“star differs from star in glory.” Here Paul uses a third Greek term: *diapherei*, which means to carry through (by extension) with a difference. It is, admittedly, a little confusing. In this context I take that to mean that different heavenly bodies carry their glory (*brilliance*; NIV: *splendor*) differently from each other. And we see that: the splendor of our sun is carried to earth far differently from the splendor of the moon, and each of those different from the far-distant stars. From Paul's use of these examples, we can draw the following conclusions:

1. God is the designer of this world, and according to His wishes (v38), there are different forms of terrestrial flesh (bodies), but their difference from each other is only a difference of the same sort—they all have a form of earth-bound flesh.
2. God also designed the *heavenly* bodies; though of differing radiance from each other (v41), they too share with each other a difference of the same sort.
3. The difference between the terrestrial bodies and the heavenly bodies, however, is a difference of a *different* sort—they are *completely* different from each other.
4. Even so, all—terrestrial and heavenly—have been given, by God's design, a measure of glory, or splendor. The Corinthians thought that there was no glory in human flesh. No, God has given glory even to earth-bound, human flesh.
5. Nevertheless, the “body” God gives the resurrected (by His wishes) with which to dwell with Him will be utterly different—of a different sort—from the buried fleshly body. Resurrected believers will *not* be simply a reanimated corpse. We will have a different glory—a different being.