

PREFACE

John MacArthur helpfully breaks down this current discussion into four points. To Paul's rhetorical question posed in v35—"But someone will say, 'How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?'"—the apostle, in the subsequent verses, answers his own questions in four ways:

1. vv36-38: he cites illustrations from nature;
2. vv39-42a: citing the different forms of earthly flesh and heavenly bodies, he hints at the makeup of resurrected bodies;
3. vv42b-44: he offers four contrasts between the earthly body and the resurrected body.

Now, in a fourth answer,

4. vv45-49: he contrasts the earthly prototype ("the first man, Adam") with the spiritual prototype ("the last Adam").

Sidebar: Pertinent to our discussion in class last week regarding the created nature of the first Adam's body, MacArthur writes this: "Adam and Eve originally were in a probationary period. Had they proved faithful rather than disobedient, their bodies would have been glorified and immortalized by eating of the fruit of the tree of life, which they then could have eaten (see Genesis 2:9). Because they sinned, however, they were put out of the garden lest they eat of the tree of life and live forever in a state of sin."

Read Genesis 2:8-9.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:44b-49.

I think of our natural, earthly bodies as I do the earth itself; thus I think of our practical stewardship of our bodies as I do our stewardship of this earth. God has called us to be good managers of the earth He has given us. Even as it has been given us to use for our benefit ([Genesis 1:26ff](#)), we are to be good stewards of its resources, keeping its water clean, its air breathable, its soil healthy and fertile. In none of this, however, are we to exalt or worship this earth as if it is a living being more important than its inhabitants. That is heresy; it is idolatry.

Just so our natural, physical bodies. We are to be good stewards of the bodies God has given us. We are to do what we can to keep them healthy and vital, and to keep them useful to our God in His service. Like the earth on which we live, our bodies belong to their Creator, to do with as He sees fit. Beyond that, however, these natural bodies are little more than the "tent" ([2 Corinthians 5:1-5](#))—a non-permanent structure—in which we dwell. They are not to become the focus of our attention; we are not to pedestalize them, making them more important than they really are. That, too, is heresy; it is idolatry.

v46

However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual.

At first glance, our response to v46 might be, “Yeah... your point?” But there is more here if we back off and consider this through a wide-angled lens.

It is understandable that mankind would be preoccupied with what they know firsthand: this earth in its present state and our physical bodies as we know them. It is also understandable that we could come to think that this is all there is and things will probably be like this always—just ask the young.

Paul opens his argument about the order of things in v46 by stating the obvious, but also by voicing an axiom that has been true since the beginning of time: the “lower life precedes the higher” (Vincent)—e.g., “bare grain” to standing wheat (v37). This puts a slightly different spin on what Paul states in v22: “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.” It is *God’s* order that the movement is from the lesser to the greater—that is, “in Christ.” Not so “in Adam.” In Adam the movement is toward inevitable degeneration, sickness, and ultimate death, and after that, eternal damnation and misery.

But *God’s* economy in Christ is the reverse of that. The essential “natural” comes first, just as it was necessary for the Son of God to be incarnated, for only then could He be nailed to a cross for our transgressions. Even for Christ, the “natural” had to come first (for our salvation) before He could be clothed in His spiritual form. Just so man.

Matthew Henry: We must bear the image of the earthy before we can bear the image of the heavenly. Such is the established order of Providence. We must have weak, frail, mortal bodies by descent from the first Adam, before we can have lively, spiritual, and immortal ones by the quickening power of the second. We must die before we can live to die no more.

v47

The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven.

No one since has been so “earthy” as the first man, Adam. We can easily say that all since were “from the earth,” for this is our home; we did not come here from somewhere else. But Adam, uniquely, emerged from the literal “dust” of the planet.

Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)

The picture is of *Yahweh elohim* reaching down into the soil of Eden with His own hands and fashioning, shaping, crafting the first human being. After He had done this, *Yahweh* “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,” thus transforming the lifeless, earthen figure into a living being with a soul.

In contrast, “the second man”—second Adam, Jesus the Christ—was not at all of this earth, not to mention, earthy. Neither of these men were born: the first man was *created*, personally by God from the soil of earth; the second “man” was eternal deity, *incarnated* on earth through the normal birth process of a human virgin. And, from an earthly perspective, the earthy man (the lesser, natural man) came first; the second, spiritual man came second. Indeed, if things had gone better in Eden, there would have been no need for the spiritual man to come at all!

All that may be true, but Paul’s purpose goes beyond this. He is not really concerned here with origins—the next two verses make this clear. A literal rendering of v47 reads,

The first	man of earth	made of dust;
The second	man of heaven.	(Fee)

That is, “of” instead of “from.” Of our common translations, only the NIV2011 faithfully renders this:

The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven.

As vv48-49 reveal, the apostle’s interest lies less with where they came from, than the difference in their qualitative characteristics: the first man had an *earthbound* perspective. He was “earthy” in the sense that he could not see beyond the immediate horizon. In Yahweh he could have had it all; instead, he chose the instant gratification of what Satan offered. In that choice he doomed not just himself, but all of humanity to follow. His body started dying the moment he bit into that fruit.

Jesus, of course, was and is the antithesis of this. And we could wax poetically about the contrasts between the two—believe me, I’d love to—but then we would lose our hold on the apostle’s purpose in these verses. Yes, Christ Jesus was *from* heaven, and it is true that while in His incarnated state He held to a heavenly *mindset* and character. But Paul is not building his argument around Christ’s heavenly perspective while in the flesh. This is all about *resurrection*, and when he states that the second man is of heaven, he refers to Christ’s resurrected, glorified state—a state that we as believers will share when we are resurrected (v49).

Gordon Fee: Believers are said to share both kinds of existence, that of Adam through their humanity, that of Christ through their resurrection. They do not share Christ’s heavenly because, *as He*, they are *from* heaven, but because at the resurrection they will receive a heavenly *body* that is just like His.

As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly.

Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

Reading vv48, I am reminded of something Jesus said in His parable about the rich man and Lazarus. From his misery and torment in Hades, the rich man cried out for Abraham to send Lazarus to cool his tongue with a bit of water. Abraham gave two reasons why this request would not be met: For the rich man it was too late; he had had his fine life prior to death. Abraham said as well, “And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us” (Luke 16:26).

Now, the “great chasm fixed” in the parable referred to the impassable gulf between Hades and heaven—“Abraham’s bosom.” But there is a similar great chasm between earth and heaven.

As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy...

Just as we have borne the image of the earthy...

Right now believers still living are “earthy,” of dust, natural, fleshly. We are sown into this world so, and so we are sown into the grave. From birth to the grave we wear the clothing (*ephoresamen*, “have borne”) of the earthy. So clothed in the apparel of the soil, there is no entrance for us into glory.

and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly.

we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

Likewise, those who have preceded us—human beings—cannot sally back and forth between. They are now free of the burden of the earthy, and in their present state they must remain (not having the passports of either deity or of the angelic messengers).

Thus we are either one or the other: we are born of Adam, earthy; in Christ, and through His groundbreaking resurrection, we are reborn of the last Adam, heavenly. In that we will be in a body imperishable, glorious, with power, and, at long last, spiritual (vv42-44).

We are either one or the other, but for those who are in Christ, ([look at the end of v44](#)) “If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.” The higher life will indeed follow the lower—it must.

Albert Barnes: As we are so closely connected with Adam as to resemble him, so by the divine arrangement, and by faith in the Lord Jesus, we are so closely connected with him that we shall resemble him in heaven. And as he is now free from frailty, sickness, pain, sorrow, and death, and as he has a pure and spiritual body, adapted to a residence in heaven, so shall we be in that future world. The argument here is, that the connection which is formed between the believer and the Saviour is as close as that which subsisted between him and Adam; and as that connection with Adam involved the certainty that he would be subjected to pain, sin, sickness, and death, so the connection with Christ involves the certainty that he will like him be free from sin, sickness, pain, and death, and like him will have a body that is pure, incorruptible, and immortal.