

# THE SPIRITUAL BODY

Spiritual body (σῶμα πνευματικόν): The resurrected spiritual body in contrast to the physical body (σῶμα ψυχικόν), which is subject to sin and death (I Corinthian 15:44). Paul's teaching, like that of Christ, (1) stands in contrast to the denial of the afterlife by the Sadducees (Matthew 22:23-33; Acts 23:6-8), and (2) contrasts with the Greek notion of the bare immortality of the soul, separated from the tomb of the body.

On analogy of God's revelation in nature, where the sown seed dies and rises to something that bears identity with the seed but is immeasurably different, Paul describes the resurrection of the dead. For Paul, again as with Jesus in His resurrected state, the person is conceived as a gestalt unity of body-spirit, not as a soul separated from the body. The whole person is lifted to a new level of existence, from the fallen and death-prone body-soul of Adam to the imperishable body-spirit of life in Christ (I Cor. 15:35-50).

Jesus in his resurrection appearances embodies the new imperishable existence, and though not of flesh and blood of the old order, or limited by physical parameters of that order (John 20:19-20), nevertheless has identifiable characteristics of flesh and bones, hands, and side, and can partake of food (Luke 24:36-43). This mysterious and "logically odd" language of the apostolic witness is not contradictory but complementary, as Jesus, John, Luke, Paul, and the other NT witnesses convey the divinely revealed fact that He rose from the grave and ascended on high.

# THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST

Jesus ascended into heaven on the fortieth day after His resurrection (Acts 1:3, 9), and the subsequent period of waiting for the descent of the Holy Spirit appears to have lasted the ten days until Pentecost (Acts 2:1).

That act of the God-man by which He brought to an end His post-resurrection appearances to His disciples, was finally parted from them as to His physical presence, and passed into the other world, to remain there until His second advent (Acts 3:21)

Luke describes this event in a unique term in Luke 24:51 and more fully in Acts 1:9. Even if the words "and he was carried up into heaven" are not part of the true text in Luke 24:51, we have good reason for saying, in the light of Luke's clear and unambiguous words in his second treatise, that the doubtful words in Luke 24:51 express what was in his mind. In accordance with the oral testimony of the apostles, he carries on his story of the life of Jesus as far as "the day that he was taken up" (Acts 1:22).

According to the Gospel of John- our Lord referred on three occasions to His ascending into heaven (John 3:13; 6:62; 20:17). Paul speaks of Christ ascending far above all heavens in order to permeate the whole universe with His presence and power (Ephesians 4:10). Such phrases as "received up in glory" (I Timothy 3:16), "gone into heavens" (I Peter 3:22), and "passed through the heavens" (Hebrews 4:14) refer to the same event. Paul exhorts the Colossian believers to "seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1), and the numerous references in the NT to the session at the right hand of God presuppose the ascension.

In Eph. 1:20 and following verses, Paul passes directly from the resurrection to the exaltation of Christ to the place of supreme power and authority in the universe. In passages like Romans 8:34 and Colossians 3:1 the session might seem to be thought of as the immediate result of the rising from the dead, thus

leaving no room, as some have argued, for the ascension as a distinct event; but it is difficult to see that there is any force in any argument derived from Paul's silence in such passages when in Ephesians 4:10 he states so emphatically his belief in the ascension.

Our Lord's post-resurrection appearances had, no doubt, shown that He belonged already to the upper world of light and glory; but with the ascension His fleeting visits to His disciples from that world came to an end, and the heavens received Him from their sight. Yet, through the indwelling Holy Spirit they were to come nearer to Him than ever before, and He was to be with them forever (John 14:16-18).

To object to the account of the ascension of Christ into heaven as implying a childish and outmoded view of the universe is, more or less, solemn trifling. The change which Christ revealed by the ascension was not a change of place, but a change of state, not local but spiritual, on the other hand we are not unscientific when we think of the land where "the king in all His glory without a veil is seen" as the upper world of light and glory, high above us as good is above evil and blessedness above misery.

The exalted Lord in heaven is our Advocate in the presence of His Father (Romans 8:34; I John 2:1; Hebrews 7:25). As our High Priest He offered on the cross the one perfect and final sacrifice for sins forever (Hebrews 10:12), and now, having sat down at the right hand of God, He has entered on His priestly ministry in heaven. As our King-Priest He communicates, through the Holy Spirit, to all believers the gifts and blessings that He died to win for them. "Christ's intercession in heaven," is a kind and powerful remembrance of His people, and of all their concerns, managed with state and majesty; not as a suppliant at the footstool, but as a crowned prince on the throne, at the right hand of the Father.

We have our place in heaven, said: The scum of the earth is on the throne of the majesty on high. We have "a sure pledge that He, as our Head, will also take us, His members, up to Himself. He sends us His Spirit, as the earnest of the promised inheritance.

The Holy Spirit was not given, in the fullness of His gracious working in the souls of men, until Jesus was glorified (John 7:39). "Being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear. For David ascended not into the heavens" (Acts 2:33-34).

Thus was it demonstrated to the universe that, the Risen Lord lives in heavenly communion with His and our Father, and that He takes an active part in the working of the power as well as of the grace of God in this world.

The Ascended Lord is with us in the struggle here (Mark 16:19-20), and we know that He has gone to heaven our entrance to secure, and our abode prepare (John 14:2; Heb. 6:20). Ascension is the visible departure of Christ into heaven, in order to receive His heavenly exaltation –where the Ascended Christ received His place of pre-incarnate power at the right hand of God.

e new existence is like, yet different from, the old, on analogy of the identity and difference between the seed and the full grain.

Σωμα πνευματικον is Paul's way of saying that the believer's personal identity, as a body-spirit unity will be raised to a new life like that of Christ Himself.