

Reformed Authors on the Glorified Resurrection Body of 1 Corinthians 15

“Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” 1 Cor. 15:50¹

Wilhelmus a Brakel: “Thus also man’s own and identical body will become alive again. From this very same body a different body comes forth, not [different] in essence, but as far as characteristics are concerned — as we have observed in [1 Cor. 15] verse 40, etc. Therefore, it will not be resurrected with the same characteristics it had when it died, but with more glorious characteristics, and these will be more preminent in the one than in the other.” [TCRS, 4.335]

- *“Objection #3 [against bodily resurrection]: ‘Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption’ (1 Cor. 15:50); ‘Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them’ (1 Cor. 6:13). Answer:* (1) The apostle does not speak here of the essence of the body, but rather of its weakness and corruption which will be taken away; in the place of corruption, dishonor, and weakness, the body will receive incorruption, glory, and power (cf. 1 Cor. 15:42-44, 53-54). (2) When the apostle says that the belly will be destroyed, he is referring to the natural use of food & drink. The latter will cease at death & in the resurrection the belly will no longer serve the purpose of digesting food.” [TCRS, 4.334]

John Calvin: “...our bodies, being liable to corruption, cannot inherit God’s incorruptible kingdom. Hence there will be no admission for us into the kingdom of Christ, otherwise than by Christ’s renewing us after his own image.” [Comm.~1 Cor. 15:50]

- “First, we must hold, as I have indicated, that as to substance we shall be raised again in the same flesh we now bear, but that the quality will be different... This Paul asserts through familiar examples [1 Cor. 15:39]. For just as the substance of human and animal flesh is the same, but not the quality [v. 39], and all stars are of the same material, but differ in their brilliance [v. 41], so he teaches that, although we shall retain the substance of our bodies, there will be a change [vs. 51-52], that its condition may be far more excellent.” [Inst. 3.25.8]

Matthew Henry: “The natural body is flesh and blood, consisting of bones, muscles, nerves, veins, arteries, and their several fluids; and, as such, it is of a corruptible frame and form, liable to dissolution, to rot and moulder. But no such thing shall inherit the heavenly regions; for this were for corruption to inherit in corruption, which is little better than a contradiction in terms. The heavenly inheritance is incorruptible, and never fadeth away (1 Pet. 1:4). How can this be possessed by flesh and blood, which is corruptible and will fade away? It must be changed into ever-during substance before it can be capable of possessing the heavenly inheritance. The sum is that the bodies of the saints, when they shall rise again, will be greatly changed from what they are now, and much for the better. They are now corruptible, flesh and blood; they will be then incorruptible, glorious, and spiritual bodies, fitted to the celestial world and state where they are ever afterwards to dwell, and have their eternal inheritance.” [Comm.~1 Cor. 15:50]

Charles Hodge: “Flesh and blood means our body as now constituted, not sinful human nature. The phrase never has this latter sense. [Heb. 2:14; Matt. 16:17; Gal. 1:16; Eph. 6:12]... It is indeed true that our unsanctified nature, or unrenewed man, cannot inherit the kingdom of God. But that is not what the apostle is speaking about. He is speaking of the body and of its state after the resurrection. It is of the body as now constituted that he says, it cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven, i.e. the kingdom of Christ as it is to exist after the resurrection [Matt. 8:11; Lk. 13:28; 1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:21; 2 Tim. 4:18]... Our bodies, therefore, if they are to be immortal and imperishable must be changed.” [1-2 Cor., 353]

- “[Paul’s] object is simply to show the absurdity of the objection founded on the assumption that the body hereafter must be what it is here. He shows that it may be a body & yet differ as much from what it is now as the light of the sun differs from a piece of clay.” [1-2 Cor., 347]

- “Adam was of the earth; Christ was from heaven; comp. John 3, 13. Adam, therefore, had a body suited to the earth; Christ had a body suited to heaven.” [1-2 Cor., 352]

- “There are two great negative statements in the Bible on [the resurrection body], which imply a great deal. One is the declaration of Christ, That in the resurrection men neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God. The other is the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:50, “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” There seem to be plainly three things implied or asserted in these passages; (1.) That the bodies of men must be specially suited to the state of existence in which they are to live and act. (2.) That our present bodies, that is, our bodies as now organized, consisting as they do of flesh and blood, are not adapted to our future state of being. And (3.) That everything in the organization or constitution of our bodies designed to meet our present necessities, will cease with the life that now is. Nothing of that kind will belong to the resurrection body. If blood be no longer our life, we shall have no need of organs of respiration and nutrition. So long as we are ignorant of the conditions of existence which await us after the resurrection, it is vain to speculate on the constitution of our future bodies. It is enough to know that the glorified people of God will not be cambered with useless organs, or trammelled by the limitations which are imposed by our present state of existence.” [ST, 3.780]

Matthew Poole: “Flesh and blood do not here signify sin, the unrenewed nature (as some would have it, but our bodies, in their present, natural, corruptible, frail, mortal state; so the terms signify (Eph. 6:12; Heb. 2:14). Flesh and blood shall inherit the kingdom of God (else our bodies could not be glorified), but our body, as in its present state, till changed and altered as to qualities, till it be made a spiritual body, shall not inherit the kingdom of God... the bodies of believers therefore must be raised up in that state of incorruption mentioned (1 Co. 15:42) before they can be capable of inheriting the kingdom of heaven. [Comm.~1 Cor. 15:50]

W.G.T. Shedd: “The *soma psychikon* or “natural” body is marked by... physical appetites and passions, such as hunger, thirst, and sexual appetite. These are founded in “flesh and blood” or that material substance of which the present human body is composed. The resurrection or “spiritual” body, on the other hand, will be marked by the qualities of the *pneuma* or “rational soul.” It will not be

¹ Cf. *Westminster Confession of Faith, Ch. 32 — “Of the State of Men after Death, and of the Resurrection of the Dead”*

composed of flesh and blood, but of a substance which is more like *pneuma* than like *psyche*, more like the rational than the animal soul. That the resurrection body of both the good and the evil will have the common characteristic of being destitute of fleshly appetites and passions and will be a “spiritual” in distinction from a “natural” body is proved by the following: [Matt. 22:30; 1 Cor. 15:50; Rev. 7:16]... Certain qualities of the “natural” body will still belong to the “spiritual”, such as extension, figure, etc. The difference will be in the secondary, rather than in the primary properties of the natural body.” [DT, 870]

Francis Turretin: “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven without a change; but this will be made either by the resurrection of the dead or by the transformation of the living. However, that change consists of the laying aside of mortality and the assumption of immortality, with the difference which ought to be observed between the good and the bad, which is usually set forth in the resurrection of each... For we confess that [the bodies of believers] will undergo a great change so as to be no longer animal, corruptible, weak, miserable and mortal, but spiritual, incorruptible, strong, glorious, and immortal (as the apostle fully teaches, 1 Cor. 15).” [IET, 3.571]

Thomas Watson: “The bodies of the saints, when they rise, shall be free from the necessities of nature, as hunger and thirst. ‘They shall hunger no more’ (Rev. 7:16). Moses on the mount was so filled with the glory of God, that he needed not the recruits of nature. Much more in heaven shall the bodies of the saints be so filled with God’s glory, as to be upheld without food.” [BOD, 310]

Westminster Annotations (1657): “Such flesh and blood as ours is now, maintained by corporal meats and drinks of a mortal and corruptible nature, cannot inherit the kingdom of God, for it followeth, *neither doth corruption inherit incorruption*. [On 1 Cor. 15:50]

Herman Witsius: “The divine goodness was willing to bless our bodies also with a participation of heavenly felicity. But their present constitution renders them incapable of so great a glory. As herbs and flowers wither and fade by the excessive heat of the radiant sun, so also our bodies, such as we now carry about with us, are unequal to bear the heavenly glory; ‘Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God’ (1 Cor. 15:50). [Here] flesh and blood do not denote our nature, corrupted by sin, but the very substance of the human body, with those infirmities of animal life, which naturally follow it. Our flesh is from blood; blood from meat and drink; and in blood consists that animal life from which the body is called animal, v. 44. By flesh and blood therefore is signified the nature of the human body as it is nourished and preserved in this life by taking meat and drink, and by the circulation of the blood. But such flesh and blood is incapable of the heavenly glory. What then? Is God to diminish the heavenly glory, that our body also may be admitted to have some participation of it? By no means. He will rather change the qualities of our body, and of terrestrial, make it heavenly, and of animal, spiritual, so as thus to bear a suitable proportion to the glory wherewith it shall be endowed, v. 40, 43. But who, while he still remains on this earth, can take in this heavenly language? And yet it is evident from undoubted testimonies of holy writ, that the righteous shall have this granted to them, and we are to look for it from our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, ‘who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself’ (Phil. 3:21), that we may shine forth, not as to our soul only, but also as to our body, ‘as the sun in the kingdom of our Father’ (Matt. 13:43).” [EOTC, 2.102]

J.G. Vos: “Q. Will the resurrection body of the redeemed be the same as the present body, or different? A. Scripture teaches that the identity of the body will be the same, but its qualities will be different. It is the same body that is buried that shall rise again, but it will rise clothed with glory and immortality (1 Cor. 15:37, 42-44).” [C-WLC, 217]

Additional Excerpts on Christ’s Bodily Resurrection and the subsequent Ascension-Glorification of His Humanity

WLC 52: “Christ was exalted in his resurrection, in that, not having seen corruption in death, (of which it was not possible for him to be held,) and having the very same body in which he suffered, with the essential properties thereof, (but without mortality, and other common infirmities belonging to this life,) really united to his soul, he rose again from the dead the third day by his own power...”

WLC 54: “Christ is exalted in his sitting at the right hand of God, in that as God-man he is advanced to the highest favour with God the Father, with all fulness of joy, glory, and power over all things in heaven and earth; and does gather and defend his church, and subdue their enemies; furnisheth his ministers and people with gifts and graces, and maketh intercession for them.

Louis Berkhof: “But the ascension of the Lord was not merely a transition from one place to another; it also included a further change in the human nature of Christ. That nature now passed into the fulness of heavenly glory and was perfectly adapted to the life of heaven.” [ST, 350]

Geerhardus Vos: “[The Gospels] show in part that a total change had really taken place in the body of the Lord... On the other hand, the body that the Lord possessed [during the 40 day period between His resurrection and ascension] did not completely coincide with the resurrection body as that is delineated for us by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. Jesus declared it to be flesh and bone (Lk. 24:39), while Paul expressly asserts that flesh and blood will not inherit the kingdom of God [1 Cor. 15:50]. Consequently, we appear here to have to think of a middle state that formed the transition to His fully glorified humanity as He possesses it in heaven. During these 40 days He could eat, although it is not to be assumed that He had need of food.” [RD 3.228]

- “Was there also associated with the ascension of Christ a further glorification that concerns his condition? Yes; His human nature was now made fully suited for the heavenly environment in which He would live from now on. Here on earth it had already been exalted above the power of earthly elements but had still not yet received its heavenly glory. The apostles to whom He appeared did not see Him as, later, Stephen, Paul, and John saw Him in His glory. In what further this change consisted is not revealed to us.” [RD 3.233]

- “Is there an essential glorification of the human nature that also accompanies taking His place at the right hand of God? Insofar as this coincides with the entrance into heaven, yes. Or one could even divide the question and say that the comprehensive transformation of the humanity of the Lord from an earthly to a heavenly accompanied the ascension, and that now this heavenly humanity received a special investiture with glory by which it was raised to the zenith of honor. [RD 3.238]