

Full Preterism Refuted

Chapter 5: Our Final Victory

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In verse 50 and following Paul introduces a new subject and brings his discussion of the resurrection to a climax. This section is important because verse 50 has become a proof text for the full preterist position; that the bodies of the saints remain in their graves forever and are replaced by completely new bodies that have no organic connection at all to what existed before. Full preterists take a chapter of Scripture which is designed by Paul to prove the reality of the resurrection of the body (the same body that was buried) and read into it their own perversion of this doctrine. They can only do this by ignoring and/or twisting what Paul says.

Paul begins by making it clear that the bodies of the saints that rise are very different from our mortal bodies. “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption” (1 Cor. 15:50). The expression “flesh and blood” forms a unitary concept (both terms do not have articles and the verb is singular) that refers to the human body as fallen, weak and corruptible. The term “flesh” can refer to our sinful nature, but the phrase “flesh and blood” is meant to be taken literally. Earlier, Paul referred to our “natural body” and now he uses a synonym for our *physical body as it exists in this life*. These two terms point us to two crucial aspects of the human body which are particularly liable to damage, disease and decay. The focus is not simply on flesh and blood as such, *but as things that perish and are corruptible*. These terms focus our attention on the frailty and mortality of our bodies. Paul is saying that our mortal bodies in the present state are not fit to enter God’s presence and exist forever in the final state. The apostle affirms the reality of the resurrection, yet rejects the idea that our bodies are not transformed. Paul is *not* saying our physical bodies are to be cast off as refuse so that a spirit body can be substituted for our old body. No, our old bodies will be *changed* (1 Cor. 15:51) or *transformed* (Phil. 3:21). That Paul is focusing on the human body as weak, frail and perishable is proved by the parallel clause, “nor does corruption inherit incorruption” (v. 50b). Believers’ mortal bodies must be changed into bodies that are immortal, imperishable, powerful and glorious.

Once we understand this verse, we see that Paul is *not* teaching that our new resurrected bodies have no physical characteristics or have nothing at all in common with our old bodies made of flesh. The point throughout this chapter is that what goes in the grave (the seed that was sown) comes out radically changed to meet all the contingencies of our new glorified existence in the consummate kingdom. If Paul’s point was that there is nothing at all physical or material about our new glorified bodies, then there would be absolutely no reason for a resurrection or redemption of our bodies that were sown. We could simply remain disembodied spirits forever. Moreover, if our new bodies only consist of spirit, then the biblical and theological connection between Jesus’ resurrection, which was bodily and real, and our resurrection is severed.

Changed Not Replaced

One of the most problematic passages for full preterists is 1 Corinthians 15:51-53: “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall 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 incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”

These verses tell us explicitly that when Jesus returns not only will dead believers be transformed, but Christians who are alive at that time will also receive new glorified incorruptible bodies. Even though *not* every believer will undergo physical death, every Christian will have to undergo a radical change so that what is corruptible or perishable will become imperishable and immortal. This happens to dead believers by resurrection and living believers by an instantaneous transformation. It is impossible to enter the kingdom of glory and dwell in God’s presence forever with our weak, corruptible, perishable bodies. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 we learn more details about this event; in particular, that the dead in Christ will rise first. Then all believers who are still alive at that time will be caught up to meet Jesus in the earth’s atmosphere (*aer*) as He descends toward the earth.

The full preterist ignores the meaning and significance of what Paul is saying and turns once again to an argument of imminence. This argument boils down to personal pronoun “we,” as in “we shall not all sleep” [i.e. die]; “we shall all be changed.” As Russell boldly asserts, “When the apostle says ‘we,’ he no doubt means the Christians of Corinth and himself.”¹ The problem with such an argument is that if Paul were truly teaching that not all the Corinthians would die (fall asleep), then he was a false prophet for they all did die. Moreover, the radical change from corruptible and mortal to incorruptible and immortal that Paul describes applies to *all Christians* whether dead or alive. It is for this reason that all Bible-believing commentators regard the personal pronoun “we” as general or generic (i.e. all believers who have died [this would now include all the apostles] as well as those believers who happen to be alive at the second coming). “Paul is not saying that Christ’s return will happen during his lifetime. Like every one of us, Paul looked forward eagerly to the end. From God’s revelation we learn that ...no one except God the Father knows the day or hour of this event (Matt. 24:36). Indeed Jesus told the apostles that it was not for them to know the times and seasons the Father has determined (Acts 1:7).”²

There are a number of things in this section of Scripture that refute the full preterist system. First, Paul is discussing an event that encompasses *all believers* whether dead or alive. Consequently, unless one completely redefines the resurrection of the dead saints and the transformation of the living saints, one must admit that such an event has obviously not occurred. It is for this reason that full preterists have invented their own unbiblical theories regarding the final resurrection and the rapture (e.g., regeneration only, a subjective spiritual experience, a release of souls from Hades, a deliverance of national Israel).

Second, given the context and the meaning of the words used it is impossible to deny that Paul is discussing a bodily physical resurrection of the dead and a radical transformation of living saints. The terms “natural body,” “man...of dust,” “flesh and blood,” “sown in corruption,” “one kind of flesh,” “the dead” [Christians] are not ambiguous. Human spirits are not made of “flesh” and cannot be equated with “flesh and blood.” Paul is answering the questions, “How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?” (v. 35). Christian spirits do *not* die and are *already* spiritually raised up. The souls of believers in heaven obviously do not need to be changed from that which is perishable and mortal to that which is imperishable and immortal. *All Christians* (whether dead or alive) will be changed in a very brief moment of

¹ J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia*, 209.

² Simon J. Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 583.

time from corruption to incorruption, from dishonor to glory, from weakness to power, from a natural body to a spiritual body. The full preterist must either abandon his system or completely ignore the plain and explicit meaning of Paul's words. Disease, dishonor, humiliation and death are incompatible with the apostle's description. Consequently, Jesus has not yet returned bodily from heaven.

Third, Paul's description of how the resurrection of dead believers and the transformation of living believers take place completely rules out the full preterist teaching of progressive resurrections throughout history. A radical transformation of *all* the dead believers and *all* the saints who are alive occurs virtually simultaneously. Paul says that it happens in "a moment," "in the twinkling of an eye." "*Moment* is *atomos* ('that which cannot be cut, or divided,' i.e. the smallest possible; we get our word 'atom' from it). It signifies the shortest possible time."³ A change that takes place instantly and completely for all the saints whether dead or alive cannot be stretched into eternity. Full preterists are guilty of twisting Scripture and adding to it.

Fourth, since this radical transformation involves all dead believers as well as living believers, we would expect this event to usher in the final state where suffering, disease and death are completely abolished. This point is precisely what is taught in the immediate context. There is the last trumpet on the last day (v. 52; cf. Jn. 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 1 Thess. 4:16-17). Not the last trumpet of the judgments in Revelation or the last trumpet for a new phase of the earthly economy, but the last trumpet of all history.

Then Paul indicates that the result of this resurrection-transformation process is the complete abolition of death itself. Earlier (vs. 23-28) the apostle had argued that God used the resurrection of Jesus to achieve a total victory. Christ's resurrection results in the resurrection of all the saints (vs. 22-23), a complete victory in history over everyone who opposes God (vs. 24-25), and even the destruction of the last enemy—death itself (v. 26). Paul returns to this theme as the climax of the power of the Redeemer's resurrection. "So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?' The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

Paul appeals to Isaiah 25:8 where the prophet proclaims that on the great day of salvation God "will swallow up death forever." The apostle follows the LXX in translating "forever" as "victory." Then he uses a text from Hosea 13:14 to taunt death as a defeated foe. Under divine inspiration Paul makes changes to the Hosea text so that it agrees with the Isaiah passage. With his exposition of the victory of Christ's resurrection essentially completed, Paul mocks this great enemy because he knows that its doom was sealed by the cross and the empty tomb. Even though believers prior to the Parousia continue to "fall asleep" in the Lord, Paul can exult in the fact that Christ has removed the sting of death. Death is really powerless over God's people. It cannot truly harm them, because they will be raised and changed into the glorious image of Jesus Himself. Interestingly, Paul expresses this taunt in the present tense because Christ's victory has already set in motion the final victory over death at the second advent. Hodge writes,

The apostle places himself and his readers in presence of the Saviour and of the risen dead arrayed in immortality; and in view of that majestic scene he breaks out in these words of triumph: "Christ has conquered. His people are redeemed. Death is disarmed. Hades is no more." Death is addressed under the figure of an animal armed with a poisonous sting which

³ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 233.

pierces even to the soul; for that sting is sin. The grave, or the Greek word Hades, means, what is unseen, the invisible world, the abode of the dead in the widest sense. It depends on the context whether the immediate reference be to the grave, the place of departed spirits, or hell, in the modern sense of that word. Here where the special reference is to the bodies of men and to the delivery of them from the power of death, it is properly rendered the grave. The only sense in which the body can be in Hades is that it is in the grave. The apostle is not speaking of the delivery of the souls of men from any intermediate state, but of the redemption of the body.⁴

The complete lack of a final and total victory over sin, evil, suffering and death is one of the greatest problems with the full preterist world view. Full preterists will acknowledge that the devil, sin and evil were defeated by the redemptive work of Christ. They will even admit that there is a sense in which the victory of the cross is being worked out in the present age. But, because they believe that every eschatological passage in Scripture was fulfilled by A.D. 70, they are forced to redefine our Lord's final victory as a massive failure. Even though Jesus has returned, defeated His foes, judged the human race and cast the devil, death and hell into the lake of fire: rebellion against God continues on a world wide scale; cults and false religions are growing by leaps and bounds; Christians in many countries are being persecuted, tortured and murdered; it is illegal in the land of Christ's birth to preach the gospel; and the mortality rate for human beings stands at 100%. God haters, blasphemers, atrocities, sin, evil, suffering and death are tolerated by God forever and ever and ever. The present evil world system is eternalized by the full preterist eschatology. The full preterist world view is not only radically unbiblical, but it is an attack on God's nature and character as well as the cross of Christ. The Bible teaches that Christ's redemptive work leaves the world in an even better state than it was before the fall. It will be redeemed and unable to rebel against God. It will be perfect and holy and we will dwell with Christ forever. But in the full preterist system, the world was far better *before the fall* than it will ever be again, forever and ever. The full preterist god allows evil to continue forever and the full preterist cross and empty tomb (at best) only achieve a partial, rather insignificant victory. It should be rather obvious by now to any Bible-believing Christian that full preterism stands firmly outside the bounds of genuine orthodox Christianity. Full preterism is clearly in the category of a cult.

When full preterists are asked how death was destroyed in A.D. 70, they will often respond that in A.D. 70 the law of Moses was removed or nullified and sin which is death's sting was removed. They attempt to prove this assertion with verse 56, "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law." The full preterist view must be rejected as unscriptural for the following reasons. First, there is not a shred of evidence from the Bible that God eliminated our sins (judicially or foundationally), Israel's sins or anyone's sins in A.D. 70. Full preterists turn an event of judgment on Israel into some kind of crucial *redemptive* historical event. This denigrates the sacrificial death of Christ. God dealt decisively with sin in His only begotten Son at the cross of Calvary where Jesus paid the *full* penalty for all His people. Israel was judged and destroyed in A.D. 70 because she rejected her Messiah and persecuted His people. The covenant nation suffered the sting of death. They were not delivered from it by the Roman armies.

Second, Paul is simply making a statement about the moral law. He is not elaborating on the fate of the Mosaic law as a covenantal administration. Sin is the sting of death because sin leads to death and sin is what renders death a terror to unbelievers. Christians do not fear death and do not experience the terrors that attend death (the pain, tortures and anguish of hell) because

⁴ Charles Hodge, *I & II Corinthians*, 357-358.

Christ has forgiven their sins. Moreover (and here is the main point in this context), believers have conquered death in Christ and will be raised glorified, incorruptible and immortal. Because of the perfect work of our Savior, death is harmless. It has no sting. It can inflict no evil.

When Paul says, “the strength of sin is the law” he is pointing out a few very important things about the moral law of God. (1) If there were no law or ethical absolutes based on God’s nature and character, there would be no sin (cf. Rom. 4:15). (2) The law makes us exceedingly sinful in two ways. It reveals to us our sins committed against God by giving us knowledge of what sin is (Rom. 7:7). It also gives sin its power by arousing sinful passions within us (Rom. 7:8-11). “The law convicts and condemns the sinner to death because the sinner is unable to fulfill its demands.”⁵

The full preterist contention that the law was done away in A.D. 70 is absurd for two reasons. (1) The New Testament makes it crystal clear that the ceremonial laws and that which was unique to the Mosaic administration of the covenant of grace was rendered obsolete and nullified *the moment* that Jesus died on the cross (Mt. 27:51; Mk. 15:38; Ac. 15:6-29; Gal. 2:4, 11-14; 3:28-29; 4:10, 21-31; 5:1-6; Eph. 2:14-22; Heb. 7:11; 8:13; 9:25, 26; 10:8, 9). Moreover, Daniel says that the death of the Messiah brought an end to sacrifice and offering (9:27). When Jesus died on the cross, Jerusalem ceased to be God’s holy city and the temple was no longer the house of God. When Christ died and the temple veil was torn from the top to bottom God departed and the continued use of the temple was a sign of unbelief and the rejection of the Redeemer. The temple became an abomination that had to be destroyed. (2) The law as a curse (the penalty of the law) and the obligations of the law (i.e. a perfect, perpetual obedience in thought, word and deed to all its demands) was fulfilled by the Savior in His life, death and resurrection and thus, when a person believes in Christ and grasps what He has done by faith, he is justified or declared righteous before God. Consequently, to say that Jesus removed the sting of death in A.D. 70 is complete nonsense.

The sting of death was removed by the redemptive work of Christ around forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Throughout history people are regarded by God as ethically perfect *judicially* the moment they believe in Christ. But subjectively the process of personal mortification and holiness takes place and grows *throughout life*. The full process of redemption in the broad sense of the term is completed only when the body is fully redeemed and made perfect at the second coming of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:1-5

For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing *is* God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

Of all the passages considered on the resurrection of the body thus far, there has been *general agreement* as to their meaning by scholars, commentators and writers within Christendom. The passage before us, however, is a difficult passage which has engendered much disagreement as to its meaning. There are essentially two different views among orthodox

⁵ Simon J. Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 586.

commentators. One view is that this passage has absolutely nothing to do with the resurrection of the body, but rather is speaking of heaven itself or a building or dwelling place in heaven (cf. Ephraim, Herveius, Aquinas, Hodge and Tasker). The other view, which is the majority view of conservative commentators, is that Paul is speaking about the reception of a new glorified body at the Parousia. The latter view makes the most sense and should be embraced. We will briefly examine this passage and discuss the manner in which full preterists have misused it.

This section of Scripture is part of an encouragement that Paul began back in 4:14. After discussing the great hardships and sufferings of the apostles and evangelists in their ministry, the apostle discusses why he is not discouraged and why we also should have hope. He begins with an explicit statement on the resurrection (“Knowing, that he who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you,” v. 14) and follows this with a number of reasons why the struggles of life are worthwhile and temporary.

Paul’s introductory phrase, “for we know,” indicates that what the apostle is about to say is common knowledge among believers because it had already been revealed to them by inspired apostolic instruction. Paul had given detailed instructions regarding the resurrection to this church (cf. 1 Cor. 6:6:13-14; 15:2-58) and had written about this issue in his first written epistle (1 Thess. 4:13-18), which had likely already been circulated widely among the churches. (1 Thessalonians was probably written during Paul’s stay in Corinth in A.D. 50 or 51. The Corinthians may have heard this letter *before* the Thessalonians.)

He says, “If our earthly house, this tent is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” Paul first emphasizes the fragile impermanence and perishability of our human bodies. Our bodies are tent-like in their frailty and removableness. They are mortal and easily killed. They are “destroyed” or “dissolved” because they decay into the earth. Our bodily existence on this earth is like living in a tent which may be taken down at any time. Our bodies are called “earthly” (*epigeios*) because they live on this world and are connected to and dependant upon this earth. Although as believers we are citizens of heaven, we are only sojourners on this present world. The use of “tent” to describe the human body as perishable is not uncommon. Peter spoke of living in his “tent” (i.e. body) which he must put off soon (2 Pet. 1:13-14). “In Jn. 1:14, indeed, the tent-metaphor is used of our Lord’s incarnation and earthly sojourn: ‘the Word became flesh and pitched His tent [*eskenosen*] among us.’”⁶

After our tent dwelling (the physical body) is taken down by death we have a house (*oikodomen*) from God not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. This section of verse one is difficult and has been the source of much misunderstanding. The full preterist will point out that Paul uses the present tense (“we have”—*echomen*) and will argue that Christians who die after A.D. 70 receive their resurrected bodies at death. There are three serious problems with such an interpretation.

First, the “present tense is often used of a future which is absolutely certain.”⁷ “New Testament writers frequently penned a present tense with a future meaning that is determined by the context. One example is in the Gethsemane narrative, where prior to his arrest Jesus says, ‘The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners’ (Matt. 26:45). Just as Jesus knew the nearness of his betrayal, so Paul knew with certainty that a heavenly home was waiting for him

⁶ Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 162.

⁷ Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978), 144.

(see John 14:2-3).”⁸ In fact the great Greek scholar A. T. Robertson regards the verb used here as a futuristic present that expresses Paul’s confidence.⁹ Full preterists either out of ignorance or (with some) out of dishonesty capitalize on the ignorance of most Christians concerning Greek grammar in order to trick people into accepting their system.

Second, the manner in which full preterists approach this passage reveals how they often violate fundamental rules of exegesis. The whole New Testament consistently and repeatedly teaches that the resurrection of the body occurs at the second coming of Christ on “the last day.” Paul throughout his career both before (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:22-28, 52-55) and after this epistle (Rom. 8:11, 22-24; Phil. 3:11, 20-21; 2 Tim. 2:18—the apostle’s last letter) teaches the unity of the eschatological complex. Given this fact, it would be exegetically irresponsible and untenable to interpret 2 Corinthians 5:1 in a manner that explicitly contradicts the rest of Scripture. Full preterist methods of interpretation where several clear verses are twisted and forced into paradigm has more in common with a cult’s methodology than historic Protestant hermeneutics. If there is a valid, sensible interpretation of this passage that is in harmony with the rest of Scripture we should accept it.

Third, if one accepts the full preterist “present tense” argument (which they use in other sections of Scripture as well), then one has not only refuted the historic, confessional, orthodox concept of the resurrection, but the full preterist view as well. Full preterists teach that the general resurrection of the dead occurred in A. D. 70. But, if we accept the present tense reasoning, then we would have to acknowledge that resurrections were occurring in A.D. 52 when Second Corinthians was written. This interpretation would mean that resurrections of the dead saints have *always been progressive*, both *before* and after A.D. 70. If they were consistent in their reasoning, full preterist would argue that *both* the historic understanding of the resurrection as well as the full preterist view were erroneous.

Paul, in this and the following verses, tells us a number of things about the house that will clothe us in the resurrection. First, it comes from God and is not made with human hands. This observation does not mean that our earthly bodies are crafted by human hands but that they come from a natural biological process through procreation, pregnancy and birth. Our glorified bodies come *directly* from God. The process is miraculous and not biological. In fact, the expression “not made with hands” is applied to regeneration (a “circumcision not made with hands,” Col. 2:11) and indirectly is used to describe the heavenly sanctuary (cf. Heb. 9:24). The whole point is that our new bodies are radically changed by God into spiritual, heavenly, glorified bodies.

The full preterist seizes upon this verse as a proof text that our old earthly bodies are allowed to remain in the earth forever and then are replaced by *completely* new bodies that have absolutely no organic connection to our old bodies. Perhaps if this was the *only* verse on the resurrection in the entire Bible we could understand such an interpretation. But as we have studied this doctrine, we have proved that the original body that died is raised (e.g., Rom. 8:11, 23; 1 Cor. 6:13-20; 15:12, 13, 18, 20-23, 36-38, 42-44; Phil. 3:21; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; etc); and the body is not *completely* replaced, but rather changed or transformed by God’s power (1 Cor. 15:52; Phil. 3:21; cf. 1 Thess. 4:16-17).

Moreover, the striking similarities between Paul’s terminology and language attributed to Jesus (“I will destroy [*ego kataluso*] this temple that is made with hands [*cheiropoieton*], and in three days I will build [*oikodomeso*] another made without hands[*acheiropoieton*]”) in Mark

⁸ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 168.

⁹ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: TN, 1934), 1019.

14:48¹⁰ removes all equivocations on this matter. Our Lord said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn. 2:19). By this statement He meant “the temple of His body” (Jn. 2:21). Paul almost certainly had in mind the connection between the resurrection of Christ’s body and the resurrection of the saints’ bodies. Although our Lord rose in the exact same body in which he was buried, His new glorified, spiritual body was a body made without hands. It was transformed and raised by the power of God. Full preterists are guilty of reading their own preconceived notions into this passage.

Second, the full preterist interpretation is refuted by Paul’s description of what takes place. He talks about being “clothed with our habitation from heaven” (v. 2) or “further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life” (v. 4). The verb used (*ependusathai*) refers to putting *one garment on over another*. Does this new garment simply cover the disembodied spirit of man as the full preterist asserts? No. Paul says “having been clothed we shall not be found naked” (v. 3). He says that he wants to be *further clothed* so that he does not have to be unclothed (v. 4). His whole point is *not*, “I want to die and get rid of my body so I can receive a spiritual shell to house my spirit”; but, “I want to put on my new glorified body so that I will not have to experience death at all.” The apostle desired to be alive when Christ returned so that his present body could be *further clothed* by his new glorified body. If the full preterist view, that we receive completely new resurrected bodies at death (that have no relation to our physical bodies that are allowed to decay forever) were true, then Paul would not have dreaded the idea of being naked (i.e. a soul without a body). Paul longed for an instantaneous change (1 Cor. 15:51 ff.) and transformation (Phil. 3:21). He wanted to be like Enoch (Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5) and Elijah (2 Kgs. 2:11) who were taken bodily to heaven and glorified without experiencing physical death and decay.

Because of his biblical worldview, Paul had a very negative concept of death. He recognized that death was a consequence of sin; that the separation of the soul from the body was unnatural. The soul and body of man were created by God to be together. God is not a Gnostic or neo-Platonist. He created us as beings with two separate aspects that were meant to be together forever if sin had not entered the picture. Consequently, Paul regarded the soul without the body as “naked.” He looked at death as something repugnant because of this separation. Therefore, Paul wants his glorified, heavenly body to cover his present earthly body like we put our overcoat on over our clothes. “The picture conveyed is that of the heavenly body being put on, like an outer vesture, over the earthly body, with which the Apostle is as if were clad, so as not only to cover it but to absorb and transfigure it. In this way the ideas both of continuity and of transformation, which are also prominent in the great resurrection chapter of 1 Cor. 15, are effectively communicated. Indeed, the very same metaphor is employed in the earlier epistle when it is said that ‘this corruption must *put on* incorruption and this mortal must *put on* immortality’ (1 Cor. 15:53).”¹¹

¹⁰ What is false about this testimony is the statement that Jesus would destroy the temple. Our Lord said, “Destroy this temple,” which indicated that the Jews would kill Him. But the statement, “in three days I will build another made without hands” is accurate. The resurrection of Christ is attributed to the Father (Ac. 2:24), Son (Jn. 2:19) and the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:11). Christ arose in a glorified, heavenly, spiritual body. His vivification came from heaven and was not a natural biological process.

¹¹ Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 168-169. Hughes writes of this verb, “This is beyond doubt the correct meaning of *ependusasthai*. The prefix *epi* signifies the putting on of an *additional* or *outer* garment. We cannot agree with Tasker, Hodge, and others that Paul is using the compound and simple forms (*ependusasthai...endusameno*) indiscriminately as synonyms. On the contrary, that a precise distinction in meaning is intended is confirmed by the terminology of verse 4, where he says that it is not that he wishes to put off a

Paul's use of metaphors in verses 2 through 4 indicates he may have still had a concern about certain "proto-Gnostics" that he had to deal with in his previous epistle. These men denied a future bodily resurrection likely in favor of a disembodied or purely spiritual immortality. Consequently, Paul asserts, "We do not desire to be *unclothed* but to be *overclothed* with our heavenly, immortal bodies." To anyone who may have been under the influence of Greek philosophy who were looking forward to a non-bodily existence Paul says, "We will not be found naked." This passage is perfectly suited to refute the full preterist concepts of the resurrection. The apostle makes it very clear that our present physical bodies are incorporated into our spiritual, glorified bodies so that although radically different, they are still the same bodies.

Philippians 3:20-21

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

In these verses Paul makes a statement regarding the position and expectation of believers as an antidote to the wicked behavior and unholy attitude of the church's enemies (cf. Phil. 3:18-19). There had been infighting in this church and thus the apostle wants them to have unity and follow his example. The Philippians need to focus on their citizenship in heaven (Philippi was made a Roman outpost in 42 B.C.. It was governed as if it was on Italian soil and the inhabitants of the city were proud of it). They need to keep in their mind that ultimately they belong to a heavenly commonwealth. Consequently, their attitude, behavior and priorities in life should reflect this heavenly rule. They are "to await eagerly" (*apekdechomai*). They are to have an urgent anticipation of the Redeemer's eschatological victory. "So Christians eagerly await the revealing of the sons of God (Rom. 8:19), their sonship, here described as the redemption of the body (8:23), the future hope (8:25), the hope of righteousness (Gal. 5:5), the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:7), and the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior (Phil. 3:20)."¹²

What is particularly important for our discussion of the resurrection is Paul's description of what takes place when Jesus returns. The verse literally reads, "[the] Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humiliation for it to be conformed to the body of His glory." There are a number of things that we need to examine in this verse. First, what does Paul mean

garment (*ekdusathai*), that is, his present earthly body, but to put on over it another garment (*ependusasthai*), that is, the glorified body which will be provided at Christ's Parousia. The usage of the same compound verb in Herodotus (*Hist.* I, 195), Josephus (*Ant. Jud.*, V, I, 12), and Plutarch (*Pelop.*, 11) establishes yet further that it bears this specific sense. To this evidence may be added that of the cognate nouns *ependuma* (Plutarch, *Alex.*, 32) and *ependutes* (Sophocles, *Frag.* 391, Pseudo-Theophrastus in Pollux, VII, 45, Nichochares, *Her.* 1, and, in biblical Greek, I Sam. 13:18, and Jn. 21:7) which are used to signify an outer garment" (Ibid 168, footnote 31). Plummer essentially concurs. He writes, "*ependusasthai*. A double compound which is not found elsewhere in N. T. or LXX. Cf. *ependutes* (Jn. xxi. 7; Lev. viii. 7; the A text of I Sam. xviii. 4). The body may be regarded either as a dwelling or as a garment, and here we have the two ideas combined; 'longing to be clothed upon with our habitation which is from heaven.' The more permanent dwelling is to be drawn over the less permanent one, as one garment is drawn over another, and is to take its place. In some way not described, the now useless *skenos* is destroyed, without being dissolved in the grave, as in the case of those who die before the Lord comes. The change from the carnal to the spiritual body is regarded as instantaneous (I Cor. xv. 52), and the change is longed for" (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978], 145).

¹² Peter T. O'Brien, *Commentary on Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 462.

by our “lowly body” or “the body of our humiliation?”¹³ When Scripture speaks of the body of humiliation it is not discussing the body as intrinsically evil, but what the body has become as a result of the fall and sin. Because of sin our bodies are weak, subject to disease, dishonor, death and physical decay. Our bodies are mortal and perishable (Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:42-44). As such, they are not fit or ready to inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50). As Paul has noted before, they must be “changed” (1 Cor. 15:51) before they are ready for eternity with Christ: “this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:53).

Second, what is meant by the word “transform?” The word (*metashematizo*) used is a compound verb consisting “of *meta* which carries the idea of change or transfer, and *schema*, which means ‘appearance’ or ‘form.’ The compound means ‘to change in fashion or appearance’ (A-S, p. 288). Thayer gives: ‘to change the figure of, to transform’ (p. 406).”¹⁴ Given this definition, the best English translation is probably “transform” (NKJV, NASB). The words “change” (KJV, RSV) and “fashion anew” (ASV), however, are certainly adequate. What is important for our study is that Paul’s description of the glorification of our physical, mortal bodies involves a change, refashioning or transforming of what is *already there*. This description is an explicit contradiction of the full preterist conception of the resurrection. The full preterist teaches that the body of our humiliation is not changed or transformed, but rather disregarded. It is left to rot in the grave forever and is replaced by something completely new different.

Third, Paul says that our bodies are *transformed* in order to be *conformed* to Christ’s glorious body. The *result* of this transformation also supports the orthodox, traditional concept of our glorification. Our physical bodies will undergo a change that makes them like our Lord’s resurrected, glorified body. This supports Paul’s teaching that “as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly man” (1 Cor. 15:49). It also concurs with John who wrote, “We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 Jn. 3:2). Our bodies will be “changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet” (1 Cor. 15:51-52). Paul is not describing sanctification, but rather the *miraculous instantaneous transformation* that takes place at the Parousia. Our Lord’s resurrection body is the prototype of His people’s glorified bodies. Our bodies, which are weak, frail and liable to sickness, suffering, death and decay, will be made spiritual, imperishable, glorious, powerful and perfect. As Robert Johnstone eloquently asserts,

Yet how different the whole man will be,—how gloriously different! The body, “sown in corruption,”—free from pain and disease, from decay and mortality. “The eyes of Jacob shall no more be dim for age; Mephibosheth shall not be lame in his feet; nor shall the senses of Barzillai be dull and languid” [Thomas Boston]; for alike age and infirmity are unknown to the “children of the resurrection.” “Sown in the dishonor” of uncomeliness it shall be “raised in the glory” of perfect and unending beauty, “fashioned like unto the body of Christ’s glory.” “Sown

¹³ The word body (*soma*) is a collective singular. This is a common Hebrew idiom where the singular applies to each member of the group. Some full preterists seize on the fact that the word is singular and argue that Paul is speaking metaphorically about a deliverance of national Israel in A.D. 70. This view not only ignores the grammar, but also has Paul making an application that doesn’t even relate to the Philippians. Christians that are suffering in Philippi need to take heart and be holy *because* God will redeem Israel? This doesn’t make any sense. If what Paul says does not apply directly to the Philippians (i.e. their resurrection in the eschaton) then the apostle’s application is illogical. “‘The body our humiliation’ is the body possessed by us in this state, and which also marks its humiliation. It connects us with the soil out of which it was formed, and by the products of which it is supported; on which it walks, and into which it falls at death” (John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Philippians* [Grand Rapids: Baker, (1884) 1979], 223-224).

¹⁴ Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament*, 344.

in weakness,” it shall be “raised in power”—power to serve the Lord unwearingly day and night in His temple, and to bear the “exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” “Sown a natural body”—a body fitted for the uses of earth,—it shall be “raised a spiritual body”—a dwelling suited in everything for the holy and happy spirit, an instrument exquisitely adapted for prosecuting the pursuits of heaven, and ministering to its pure and exalted joys.¹⁵

Fourth, the transformation of our body of humiliation is in accordance with our Lord’s power that subdues all things to Himself (v. 21b). As in a number of other resurrection passages, Paul places the glorification of believers’ mortal bodies in a connection with the Savior’s subjection of everything under His kingship. “Christ is able not only to transform the body, but ‘also to subject’ (*kai upotaxai*) the entire universe (*ta panta*) to Himself. Indeed, one may state that ‘Christ’s transformation of man into his own image (cf. Rom. 8:29) is an integral part of his subjection of the entire universe to his own person.’”¹⁶ Thus, once again, we see that by redefining the resurrection of the body passages and placing the second coming of Christ in A.D. 70, the full preterist is forced to redefine and *greatly limit* the victory of the cross and the empty tomb. The physical part of Christians is *never* redeemed and the planet earth is *never* purged of the effects of sin.

Conclusion

Our examination of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body and the treatment of this doctrine by full preterists has demonstrated a number of serious errors in the hyper-preterist system.

First, there is the problem of faulty hermeneutics used by full preterists. They come to every passage about the second coming and resurrection with the presupposition (which is contrary to the explicit teaching of Scripture) that everything took place in A.D. 66-70 with the destruction of Israel. This assumption forces them to treat *every single passage* on the eschatological resurrection of the body in the *entire Bible* as *metaphorical or apocalyptic*. This methodology has forced them to repeatedly follow a number of erroneous procedures. (1) They often ignore the plain intent of the author (e.g., Paul’s comforting of believers who have *dead* loved ones [1 Thess. 4:13-18]; the proper sanctified treatment of our *physical bodies* [1 Cor. 6:13-18]; the *nature* of our resurrected physical bodies [1 Cor. 15:35 ff.]; etc). (2) They ignore or redefine the plain meaning of words without any exegetical justification in the immediate context (e.g., graves, mortal body, descend, air, those who sleep, the dead in Christ, raised incorruptible, changed, transformed, etc). Passages that are didactic and non-metaphorical are treated as difficult and esoteric. (This may explain why their literature ignores the very large body of orthodox Christian scholarship, study and exposition on the passages in question. Are we to believe that, out of all the scholars, pastors and Christians from the church fathers in the first century to the nineteenth century, *not even one* saw the truth on eschatology? I challenge every full preterist to produce five Christian authors *prior* to the nineteenth century who believe that the second coming of Christ occurred in A.D. 70). (3) When the plain teaching of a passage contradicts their theology, they use an unrelated passage to explain it away (e.g., Matthew 24 is superimposed on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and thus the fact that Paul is discussing a literal resurrection, a literal descent of Christ and a literal meeting of the saints in the air is ignored or

¹⁵ Robert Johnstone, *Lectures on the Book of Philippians* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, [1875] 1977), 330-331.

¹⁶ Peter T. O’Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*.

explained away). (4) They are very adept at finding a specific meaning of a word (e.g., body, air, etc) in a context that agrees with their eschatology and then *arbitrarily* applying it in contexts where it is obviously inappropriate (e.g., In 1 Corinthians 6:13 ff. the word “body,” which clearly refers to the physical body [cf. 1 Cor. 6:15, 16, 18], is said to be the body of sin [i.e. the sinful nature] or Israel as a corporate body. In 1 Thessalonians 4:17 the word air [*aer*] is said to be in man’s spirit or in the spirit realm because Satan is the prime of the power of the air [Eph. 2:2]. Why would dead Christians who are already in Christ’s presence in heaven go to meet Him in a spiritual realm?).

Full preterists essentially deny the perspicuity of Scripture. Although there are some things in the Bible that are difficult to understand, those things that we need to comprehend for salvation and biblical living are so plainly revealed that any Christian can easily grasp them. The Scriptures which describe the resurrection of the body are straightforward didactic passages. That is why the church has always agreed on the *bodily* resurrection of believers. It is only when the full preterist takes hold of these passages do we learn that they are exceptionally difficult, metaphorical and esoteric. Perhaps, this is why the full preterists have so many different viewpoints among themselves about the events surrounding the second coming of Christ. They spend far more time attempting to explain away the meaning of passages than actually exegeting them. They are like those of whom Peter spoke who twist the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:16).

Second, the most serious problem with full preterism is that its denial of a bodily resurrection results in a redefinition of the fall and the rejection of the gospel itself. Because salvation from physical death or the redemption of the physical bodies of believers obviously did not take place in A.D. 70, full preterists are forced to accept physical death in the animal realm and even among humans prior to the fall as perfectly normal. This results in two radical heresies. (1) Death, suffering, bloodshed and evil are attributed to a *direct creative act* of God. Jehovah becomes the *responsible agent* of pain, suffering, death and evil instead of man. The earth is dangerous and evil outside of Eden because God made it that way and in their worldview always intends it to be that way. This is a radical departure from the biblical concept of God. (2) Because hyper-preterists accept physical death as purely good, normal or natural and not something that is a consequence of the fall, they are forced by their paradigm to *redefine* the death and resurrection of Christ as something far less than what they are. Although a full preterist could say that Jesus experienced “spiritual death” for His people on the cross, they cannot say that He *died* for our sins without contradicting their own system. They are left to argue that He died so His soul could visit the saints in Hades and tell them of their release; and/or so that He could rise as a sign to the Jews. The vicarious atonement is denied. The saving nature of Jesus’ death is denied. The biblical teaching that without the shedding of blood there is no remission (Heb. 9:22) is denied. The central core of the gospel, that Jesus died for our sins according to the Scripture (1 Cor. 15:3; cf. Rom. 5:6-10; Gal. 3:13; etc), does not fit into their system. They must reject it or admit that physical death is part of the penalty for sin. It is for this reason that full preterism cannot be considered as part of Christendom or evangelicalism. It must be classified as an eschatological cult.

Moreover, because full preterists believe that death is natural and physical bodies do not rise, they radically distort the resurrection of Christ. This should be expected because Paul warned the Corinthians that if physically dead men do not arise, then logically Jesus did not rise (1 Cor. 16:13). They do not explicitly deny the bodily resurrection of Christ. They do, however, radically redefine it and distort it. Full preterists do *not* believe that Christ rose with a glorified

body. They teach that He arose with a regular unchanged human body and that, after it was used as a sign to the Jews, it was discarded. Why would they teach this? They teach this because if our Lord rose with a glorified, incorruptible spiritual body it would imply the redemption of the physical bodies of all Christians. They use the first fruits analogy to teach that all believers receive *completely* new and different spirit bodies. They believe that all Christian physical bodies will rot in the earth forever. They are never redeemed. Consequently, they are forced by their system to reject the saving efficacy of Christ's resurrection for believers. His resurrected glorified body is not really a first fruit at all. Indeed, the full preterist view of the human body has more in common with Gnosticism or neo-Platonism than Christianity because they teach that our physical bodies *as created by God* are defective (i.e. perishable, corruptible, liable to sickness, disease and death) and were *always designed* to be permanently disposed of like a bag of trash. They even teach that if Jesus had not been crucified He would have died of old age like everyone else! Thus, full preterists, like modernists, deny the resurrection of Christ by redefinition.

Third, because full preterists view suffering, death and evil as a normal part of God's created order and because they believe the second coming, resurrection and final judgment happened in A.D. 70, they teach that the suffering, death and evil in this world will *never* come to an end. In other words, the ultimate victory of the cross and empty tomb are redefined and consequently denied. The Bible explicitly teaches that *every* enemy of God will be subdued by the theanthropic Mediator until even death itself is conquered (1 Cor. 15:54-57; Rev. 21:4). The hyper-preterist has reduced the efficacy of Jesus' redemptive work to the point that Satan's victory over Adam in the garden is made *permanent*. They teach that the work of Christ will leave this world in a *far worse condition forever* than it was *before* the fall. Their doctrine makes a mockery of God's character, the power of the cross and the kingship of Christ.¹⁷

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¹⁷ There are some very lenient partial preterists who argue that full preterists should be accepted into the church as genuine believers with some errors that are not fundamental because Paul considered the professing Christians at Corinth who denied the resurrection to be brethren. This argument suffers from a number of serious problems. First, church members are not excommunicated without being given an opportunity to repent. If those who denied the resurrection rejected Paul's corrective teaching in 1 Corinthians 15 and were obstinate in their false doctrine, they would have been disciplined in due time. Second, such an argument would prove too much because Paul has a whole section in Chapter 6 where he deals with church members who were having sex with prostitutes. Does this reality mean that churches should tolerate habitual whoremongers as church members and serve them the Lord's supper? Obviously, like those who denied the resurrection, they would have been disciplined if they refused to repent. Third, Paul's first and foremost argument against those who deny the resurrection of the body is that it logically destroys a central feature of the gospel itself—the resurrection of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 15:13-19). Clearly, Paul himself regarded a *denial* of the literal resurrection of believers' physical bodies from the dead as destructive of the Christian faith. Given the apostle's argumentation in 1 Corinthians, the full preterist teaching that God is the *direct* cause of death, suffering and evil in this world and the full preterist's *explicit* denial that Jesus saves both our bodies and this fallen world, they must be treated as damnable heretics. Such a view may be regarded as unloving, intolerant and even unchristian in our pluralistic culture where church discipline is almost non-existent, but we are thoroughly convinced it is the biblical position.