

And just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, let us also bear the image of the man of heaven

1 Cor 15:42 *It is the same with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable.* 43 *It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;* 44 *it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.* 45 So also it is written, “*The first man, Adam, became a living person*”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 However, the spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and then the spiritual. 47 The first man is from the earth, made of dust; the second man is from heaven. 48 Like the one made of dust, so too are those made of dust, and like the one from heaven, so too those who are heavenly. 49 And just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, let us also bear the image of the man of heaven.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

That the beginning (*protology*) and the end (*eschatology*) should resemble each other is a common idea in apocalyptic. The pattern is taken to be an indication of (divine) purpose, with the end completing the beginning. Thus, the matching affirmations in this reading constitute an argument “from congruency.”

CONTEXT IN THE COMMUNITY

Having expanded the imagination of the Corinthians in vv. 35-41, Paul goes on to apply the metaphors in the case of Jesus’ resurrection and our future resurrection.

KIND OF WRITING

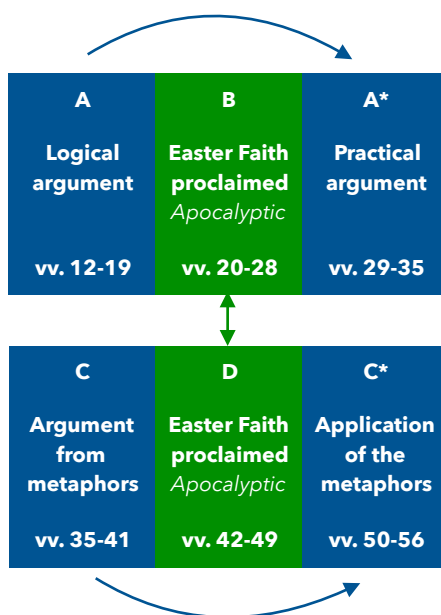
- Introduction* vv. 1-2 The tradition
- Statement of Facts* vv. 3-11 Witnesses
- Thesis I* v. 12 No resurrection?
- Proof I* v. 13-24 Logical follow-through
- Thesis II* v. 35 What kind of body?
- Proof II* vv. 36-56 Using imagination
- Conclusion* v. 57 Final exhortation

The overall argument in 1 Corinthians 15 can be “mapped” using the diagramme on this page. It means that the text can be read in two ways: “vertically”, that is, as a linear argument and “horizontally”, that is, reading the pairs of argument side-by-side. Thus, A and A*, C and C* go together. B and D also inhabit the same symbolic world.

At the centre of each argument is a faith

proclamation, in the typical language of Jewish apocalyptic. Logic takes you some of the way but to get to the heart of the matter, it was essential for Paul to switch to apocalyptic, because he himself was a Christ-believing apocalyptic Jew. We may wonder how much his Corinthian readers managed to understand this. However, if some at least came from the group of “God-fearers”, they would have the background to make sense of it.

Our reading comes entirely from D, vv. 42-45, omitting the opening verses. With so short a reading, it could be expanded.



RELATED PASSAGES

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also came through a man. For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ, the first fruits; then when Christ comes, those who belong to him. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when he has brought to an end all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be eliminated is death. For he has put everything in subjection under his feet. But when it says “everything” has been put in subjection, it is clear that this does not include the one who put everything

in subjection to him. And when all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:20–28)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verses 42a Paul begins to draw conclusions from his metaphorical illustrations and argument in vv. 35-41. Body means more than one kind of reality.

Verses 42b-44 The series of contrasts is climactic leading to the shocking claim that there is a spiritual body — a stark oxymoron to Greeks. But Paul has already shown that body is *not univocal* but polyvalent.

Verse 45 The claim to a spiritual body is now supported by an argument from apocalyptic congruence. Just as we have resembled Adam, likewise we will resemble Christ, who is a life-giving spirit.

Verse 46 Paul notes a kind of chronological hierarchy or sequence, from the lower to the higher.

Verse 47 The fact that Paul names neither Adam nor Jesus obliges the hearers to figure out who is intended. As note above, such an argument works from the apocalyptic belief in the resemblance between the beginning and the end.

Verse 48 Paul applies v. 47 to the present reality of the Christian believer. If this is true of all believers, it is also true of those who have died already.

Verse 49 This general teaching is then conversation in hope, the aspiration that we indeed become like the “man from heaven.” Paul will further apply the argument in vv. 50-56, the substance of next Sunday’s excerpt.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Paul expands the minds and imagination of the Corinthians. Has my Christian hope been expanded and strengthened?
2. Paul’s argument is based not on nature (immortality of soul) but on Christ and his resurrection. Is this part of my faith as well?

PRAYER

Creator God, in Adam you created us in your image in and likeness. Continue in us the work of your grace that we grow into the image and likeness of the Second Adam, your risen Son, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.