

# A COMMENTARY ON THE APOSTLE PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

According to the Homilies of St. John Chrysostom and other Fathers of the Church

by  
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## Chapter Fifteen

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## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### Defeat of the Last Enemy

BACKGROUND: One of the false teachings being disseminated in Corinth was that there is no physical resurrection of the dead. Paul takes great pains to refute this heresy.

**15:1-2.** *Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.* The good news of the Gospel is that those who believe it and live accordingly will be saved from eternal separation from God.

**15:3-7.** *For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.* The basis for our salvation is not what we do but what Christ did. The fact that He was seen alive after He was crucified (as verified by the historical record of eye-witnesses) is proof that He rose from the dead, thus conquering death for us. To those who say that He did not really die but merely passed out, to be revived by the coolness of the tomb in which He was laid, there is the evidence of the blood and water which gushed from His body when the soldier pierced His side with a sword (John 19:34-35), a separation which takes place only after death.

**15:8.** *Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.* Paul saw Christ also—but later than all the others (after the Ascension: Acts 9:1-9). The Greek text for the phrase *born out of due time* reads: *ektroma* (abortion) meaning either:

a. the reference is to "the sudden intervention by which he was torn from opposition to become an apostle,"<sup>1</sup> or...

b. it is "rather an expression of modesty than anything else...."<sup>2</sup>

**15:9-10.** *For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.* Paul feels unworthy of his calling because of the time in his life when he had zealously persecuted Christians (Acts 26:9-11, Gal 1:13). But after He was visited by Christ on the road to Damascus, he was transformed into an even more zealous Apostle of the Gospel (Gal 1:15-16). In cooperation with divine grace, which enabled him, Paul worked very hard, out of gratitude and love for that which God had done for him.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** (a). The Apostle Peter denied Jesus three times (Mt. 26:31-35, 69-75) and Paul zealously persecuted Christians (Acts 8:1-3), yet they went on to become leaders in the Church. How can this be?

**15:11.** *Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.* Though not one of the original Twelve, Paul is considered equal with them.

Paul's authority as an apostle is proved by the writings of Luke (Acts 22:6-10, 26:12-18, 9:10-16), his constant companion and fellow traveler. IRENAEUS<sup>3</sup>

**15:12-16.** *Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.* The Corinthians were still under the influence of pagan thought: that the soul is immortal but spent eternity without a body. Thus they considered physical resurrection to be impossible. This was in direct opposition to the Gospel taught by Paul and the other Apostles: that Christ was raised bodily from the dead—concrete proof that there is life after death—and that there will be a general bodily resurrection of all mankind, some to eternal enjoyment of the blessings of God and some to *the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels* (Mt 25:41). If Christ did not rise from the dead, Paul and the Apostles are guilty of spreading falsehoods.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** (b). It seems that mankind has always instinctively known—or hoped—that there is some type of life after death. What in the human experience would contribute to this conclusion?

**15:17.** *And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!* God's plan, as revealed to mankind through prophecy, called for the Messiah to take on flesh, and then allow Him to be put to death, sharing the consequences of sin fully with man. Christ fulfilled this mission. But because He had not sinned, death could not hold Him. Thus He conquered death once and for all. If He did not rise from the dead, there is no hope for any of us, for we cannot achieve salvation on our own, as the Law of the Old Testament demonstrated dramatically (see this study for 1 Cor 5:2).

**15:18.** *Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.* If Christ did not rise from the dead, there is no hope beyond the grave for anyone who put his faith in Christ as the promised Messiah.

**15:19.** *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.* If Christians believe in Christ with the hope of blessings in this life only, they are to be pitied, for trying to live the life of Christ brings with it struggle and persecution of one sort or another. Without the hope of eternal life with God, we might as well eat, drink and be merry, taking advantage of fleeting joys where we may (no matter of what sort they might be), for life is short. This seems to be the frame of mind of those who think that the main reason for life is the pursuit of pleasure.

**15:20.** *But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.* Christ was the first to be resurrected from the dead to die no more. Others, like Lazarus (Jn 11:43) and the son of the widow of Nain (Lk 7:11-15), were resurrected only temporarily—only to die again. Those who put their faith in Christ will rise from the dead to live forever joyously, as He did.

**15:21-22.** *For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For*

**as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.** After Adam (the first man) disobeyed God, he and Eve were cast out of Paradise into the world where the Devil and his demons were already in residence (Rev 12:7-9, Lk 10:18). Since all mankind descends from Adam and Eve, everyone given life enters that world, where it is easy to sin and difficult to pursue righteousness, and where everyone (except those alive at the Second Coming of Christ) must die. It is therefore necessary, and fitting, that through Man (Christ—called, theologically, the Second Man), the opportunity for eternal life with full access to all of God's goodness was returned to mankind.

**15:23. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.** No-one knows when Christ will return to earth for the second (and final) time (Mt 25:13). When He does, the dead will be resurrected. The first to rise will be those who belong to Christ. Some theologians indicate that *each in his own order* refers to a believer's relationship to God, with the closest to Him in this life being resurrected first, etc.

**15:24-25. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.** Christ will reign as Head of the Church until all His enemies are made subject to Him, as prophesied (Ps 110:1, Mt 22:44). Then Jesus will turn Himself and His Kingdom (all His followers) over to God, ending any other rule and authority over man:

...to wit, the devil and the bands of demons (many as there are), and the multitudes of unbelievers, and the tyranny of death, and all evils... CHRYSOSTOM<sup>4</sup>

**15:26. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.** The *souls* of believers are delivered from death at Baptism<sup>5</sup> (subject to judgment of their ensuing life), but they are deprived of their *bodies* through death. At the Second Coming of Christ, they will be resurrected with new bodies. Thus, the last enemy will have been eliminated. Those who belong to the Kingdom of God will experience it fully: body and soul.

...the bodies heretofore held [by the Devil] will be snatched away from him. CHRYSOSTOM<sup>6</sup>

**15:27-28. For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.** Everything came from God, so everything will return to His domain.

**15:29. Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?** Christian Baptism is a symbol of death to sin (water: a symbol of cleansing; total immersion: a symbol of death; the bringing out of the water: resurrection to new life in Christ). If this Sacrament is participated in with faith, either on the part of the baptized, if they have reached the age of reason, or on the part of the parents and/or godparents in the case of infants, it is with the hope of resurrection from death, as promised by God (Romans 6:4-9), and as prefigured by Christ's Resurrection. If there is no resurrection from death, why participate in Baptism?

It was a heresy in the second century among the Marcionites and the Montanists to baptize, by

proxy, those who had died without having been baptized—a complete misinterpretation of Paul's words:

I know indeed that I shall excite much laughter; nevertheless... I will mention it that you may the more completely avoid this disease: when any Catechumen departs among them, having concealed the living man under the couch of the dead, they approach the corpse and talk with him, asking if he wishes to receive baptism; then when he makes no answer, he that is concealed underneath says in his stead that of course he should wish to be baptized; and so they baptize him instead of the departed, like men jesting upon the stage. So great power has the devil over the souls of careless sinners. Then being called to account, they allege that even the Apostle [Paul] said: "They who are baptized for the dead." See their extreme ridiculousness. Should we answer these things? I think not; unless it is necessary to discourse with mad men of what they in their frenzy utter. But so that none of the more exceedingly simple folk may be led captive, we must respond. If this was Paul's meaning, why did God threaten him that is not baptized? For henceforth, it is impossible that any should not be baptized, and any fault would no longer be with the dead but with the living. But to whom did He speak: *Unless you eat My flesh, and drink My blood, you have no life in you?* (Jn 6:53). To the living, or to the dead? And again, *Unless a man be born again of water and of the Spirit, he cannot see the Kingdom of God* (Jn 3:5). For if this be permitted, and there be no need of the mind of the receiver nor of his assent while he lives, what hinders both Greeks (pagans) and Jews thus to become believers, other men after their decease doing these things in their stead? CHRYSOSTOM<sup>7</sup>

Mormons (Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints) continue this heresy. Their vast genealogical library was devised to allow their followers to trace their ancestors, for the purpose of baptizing them by proxy.

**15:30-32. *And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!*** If there is no resurrection from death, why did Paul and the other Apostles constantly put their lives at risk? Would they willingly go to early graves if there is nothing beyond this life?

**15:33-34. *Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits. Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.*** Christians should not associate with those who believe and teach that there is no resurrection from the dead, lest their faith in resurrection be weakened. He who believes this falsehood will act accordingly, neglecting to prepare for that which lies beyond this life.

**15:35-36. *But someone will say, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?" Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies.*** We can learn about death and resurrection from nature. The cycle of plant life demonstrates the fact that death is necessary to perpetuate life (Jn 12:24). Seeds from plants which have died are cast into the earth to bloom again. Who can reproduce the miracle of the growth of a great tree from a tiny seed? Where in the seed can we see the wood? ...the bark? ...the green leaves? ...the rich fruit?

**15:37-38. *And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain--perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body.*** The Corinthians thought Christians believed that the bodies of the dead would be

resuscitated. But Paul declares that from dying wheat, new wheat grows—not resuscitated old wheat. If a kernel of corn is planted, it dies, and from it new corn grows—not resuscitated old corn.

**15:39-41. All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory.** Just as each of God's creations (earthly and heavenly) has its own special body, each of those who enter the fullness of God's Kingdom will have a body reflecting their relationship with Him (which begins during life on earth). Those away from God's presence (II Thess 1:9) will receive a body that reflects their degree of estrangement from God.

What do we learn from this? That though they be in God's kingdom, all shall not enjoy the same reward; and though all sinners be in Hell, all shall not endure the same punishment.  
CHRYSOSTOM<sup>8</sup>

Gregory of Nyssa wrote that at the Resurrection, each person will receive "a distinctive mark" revealing attributes of virtue or evil.<sup>9</sup> Each person's appearance will reveal what he is. Basil agrees that sins affect "the external appearance of the soul" and "devastate its natural beauty." Thus the separation by Christ (Mt 25:32) of the sheep (righteous) from the goats (sinners) will be easy.

**15:42-43. So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.** Just as new life grows from the seed of a plant after it dies, so it is with human beings. When the human body is buried, it has been corrupted through sin and the decaying process that takes place through disease, injury, and/or age, culminating in death, which brings further decay. At the Resurrection, the body and the soul of the person of God who is raised to eternal life will be incorruptible, unchangeable (unable to sin or decay in any way)—glorious and powerful.

**15:44-45. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam became a living being. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.** Life on earth takes place in a "natural" body like that of Adam, who brought death into the world with his disobedience. When we die, this natural body is buried. Our life in the Kingdom of Heaven will take place in a "spiritual" body, like the resurrected body of Jesus Christ, Who is called the "last Adam" in the sense that He undid the harm brought about by Adam's disobedience. (For a description of the spiritual body of God's Kingdom, see this study and "Food For Thought Comments" of 2 Cor 5:1-2.)

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** (d). Why does verse 44 imply such a complete distinction between the natural and the spiritual body. Is it not possible to be spiritual in this life?

**15:46. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual.** Just as God's most superior creation was His last (man), so too, the more superior spiritual body follows

the inferior physical body.

**15:47. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven.** God created the first *type* of man (Adam), a human being, from the dust of the earth (Gen 2:7). The second type of Man (Christ) was not created. He was sent from Heaven, and became flesh (John 1:14) through the Theotokos, making Him both human and divine.

**15:48-49. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.** Because of his disobedience, Adam was condemned to return physically to the dust from which he came. Because we are descended from Adam and Eve and have, therefore, inherited the consequences (not the guilt)<sup>10</sup> of their original sin, we live in a world where temptation abounds and the flesh is weak (Mt 26:41). Thus we have all sinned, and all (except those alive at the Second Coming of Christ) will die. Jesus Christ came to earth to give all mankind the opportunity to rise above the sinfulness of the world and to be saved from that condemnation by being "born again" spiritually "of water and the spirit" (Jn 3:3-6), through the Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation. We can thereby become a part of the Body of Christ and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, to be part of the "heavenly," able to grow in holiness in imitation of Christ as an outgrowth of love for Him and in preparation for joining Him fully one day. We may have to pass through death, but death will not hold us, as it did not hold Christ.

There are four forms of wisdom: first, moral judgment, or the knowledge of what should and should not be done, combined with watchfulness of the intellect; second, self-restraint, whereby our moral purpose is safeguarded and kept free from all acts, thoughts and words that do not accord with God; third, courage, or strength and endurance in sufferings, trials and temptations encountered on the spiritual path; and fourth, justice, which consists of maintaining a proper balance between the first three. These four general virtues arise from the three powers of the soul in the following manner: from the intelligence, or intellect, come moral judgment and justice, or discrimination [discernment]; from the desiring power comes self-restraint; and from the incensive power comes courage.

Each virtue lies between two unnatural passions. Moral judgment lies between craftiness and thoughtlessness; self-restraint, between obduracy and licentiousness; courage, between overbearingness and cowardice; justice between over-frugality and greed. The Four virtues constitute an image of the Heavenly man, while the eight unnatural passions constitute an image of the earthly man.

PETER OF DAMASKOS<sup>11</sup>

Rather than "*we shall also bear...*" which would refer to the resurrected body that the righteous will receive, *Chrysostom* wrote that the correct translation of the original Greek text of 15:49 is: "*let us also bear the image of the Heavenly Man,*"<sup>12</sup> meaning: as we have sinned, after the example of Adam, let us with fervor participate in righteousness, after the example of Christ.

**15:50. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.** Flesh and blood are elements of the natural body, which needs food to sustain it and is subject to sickness, injury, decay, and death. This type of body cannot be a part of the Kingdom of Heaven, where nothing corruptible can exist. A body that is corruptible cannot inherit incorruptibility.

**15:51-54. 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. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."** Some will be, and so will remain, alive at the Second Coming of Christ. At the sound of God's trumpet (1 Thess 4:13-18), the dead will rise, and everyone will be changed from corruptible (capable of sin and decay) and mortal (capable of death), to incorruptible and immortal. Then the final enemy (death of the body) will have been conquered, in fulfillment of prophecy (Isaiah 25:8).

**15:55. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?** These wondrous words were quoted by John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople (+407), in his Resurrection sermon, which is read at the Paschal Liturgy in every Orthodox Church each year.

Death no longer has the sting it had before Christ died to atone for our sins and was resurrected to show us that there is life after death:

-Before the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ, the price for entering the Kingdom was being perfect according to the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament. This precluded anyone (except Enoch and Elijah, who were perfect, not in the sense that Christ was, but in relation to what had been revealed to them in their time in history/Gen 5:24 and 2 Kings 2:11) from escaping the clutches of Hades upon their death. The victory of Hades then was every human being, body and soul.

-After Christ's Resurrection, Hades lost the souls of believers but *retained* the victory of their bodies. At the general Resurrection, the Devil will lose this final round.

**15:56-57. The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks are to God, Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.** The Old Testament Law condemned sinners. It gave sin power over man because it showed him he would have to be absolutely perfect to earn salvation (Jas 2:10). Since this is impossible in this world in which Satan has power, man needed to be rescued from this damning dilemma. So God sent His Son to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Death has lost its sting of permanence for those who are guilt-free through Christ (by being a part of Him). We owe thanks, praise and worship to God, Who, through His Son provided this victory for us.

Jesus Christ is now the true mediator between God and men, granting us through faith and the Holy Spirit a share in Himself. To share in the life of the Heavenly Man we are called to be faithful to Him, become like Him in virtue. This cannot be accomplished without repentance, the recognition of sins, and the confession which a merciful God has provided for us. Thus we may be reconciled to Him and recover the boldness which Adam had with his Creator, and speak to him as "friend to friend" and see Him clearly.

SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN<sup>13</sup>

**15:58. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the**

***work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*** All who continue the struggle to live Christ-like lives will not labor in vain. They will live eternally with God.

And these things I say, neither to grieve you nor to throw you into despair, but lest nourished by vain and cold hopes, and placing confidence in this person or that, we should neglect our own proper goodness. For if we be slothful, there will be neither righteous man nor prophet nor apostle nor anyone to stand by us. But if we have been earnest, having in sufficiency the plea which comes from each man's own works, we shall obtain the good things that are laid up for them that love God to which may we all attain.

CHRYSOSTOM<sup>14</sup>

No matter how difficult life on earth may be—or how much we may suffer in the pursuit of the Christ-like life—we know there will be Resurrection! Hallelujah!

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT COMMENTS

**(a). The Apostle Peter denied Jesus three times (Mt. 26:31-35,69-75) and Paul persecuted Christians (Acts 8:1-3); yet they went on to become leaders in the Church. How can this be?** Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Part of the Gospel He brought was that anyone who comes to Him with a truly repentant heart can be forgiven and given a chance to make a new start through the authority He gave the Apostles to loose and to bind sins (Jn 20:22-23). This authority has been passed on in the Church since that time by apostolic succession, giving those who have sinned the opportunity to partake of the Sacrament of Repentance (Confession). Those who have sinned greatly and then experienced this forgiveness through Christ often become very zealous and devoted servants of our Lord because they recognize and are humbled by and grateful for God's abundant mercy. Peter and Paul are powerful examples of this phenomenon. Peter's denial of Christ was no less serious than Judas' betrayal, but Peter repented, so was forgiven, making him an important example for all Christians. John 21:15-17 points to the fact that Jesus gave Peter a chance to repent for each of the three times he had denied Christ. Paul's zealous persecution of Christians before he was confronted by Christ serves as an example of the fact that forgiveness is available to everyone.

**(b). It seems that mankind has always instinctively known—or hoped—that there is some type of life after death. What in the human experience would contribute to this conclusion?** God has provided many hints in nature to lead man to the great truth of resurrection:

(1). There are daily proofs:

-the cycle of daylight and darkness, day into night and into day again.

-the cycle of wakefulness and sleep. We sleep, we awaken—a prefiguration of death and resurrection. Sleep is a blessing, necessary for a healthy, vibrant life. When we are tired, we enter sleep gratefully. If we live a long, full and productive life, contributing to those around us, knowing life's purpose (to find God, Acts 17:26-27, and become one with Him), and have prepared for the eternal Kingdom, we will approach death peacefully. This is one of the things for which we pray at each Divine Liturgy: Aa Christian end to our life, painless, blameless,

peaceful, and of good defense before the fearful Judgment Seat of Christ."<sup>15</sup>

When death comes early in life, it is not easy to accept. It's like going to sleep too early—giving up much of the day. But still there is Resurrection! Those who understand this die peacefully and those they leave behind are comforted with the hope that they can someday be together with their loved ones again. For these, death has lost its sting. This is why Christians, though they lament the death of loved ones, do not mourn in the same way as do those who do not have the hope of resurrection.

It is good to talk about death (but not to dwell on it) to try to understand why it is a part of life. If we do not, we build up a type of fear that prevents us from really living. It is said that some of the saints kept skeletons in their closets for this very reason. Any discussion of death, however, would be incomplete without also coming to an understanding of the truth of resurrection.

(2). There are annual proofs: Summer fades into autumn, which rolls into winter, which bursts into spring again. Spring corresponds to man's youth, summer his prime, autumn the harvest years when he can enjoy the fruit of his labor. Winter, which corresponds to old age, can be marked by decline—but can also be rich, when used to look back on a life of meaning and forward with great expectation to resurrection and union with God. The seeming death of nature in winter is followed by resurrection in spring. It is fitting that Pascha be in spring—all part of God's perfect plan!

(3). God has also implanted in man the desire to live forever, as another hint of resurrection:

...just as, the body being mortal, its senses also have mortal things as their objects, so, since the soul contemplates and beholds immortal things, it follows that it is immortal and lives forever. For ideas and thoughts about immortality never desert the soul, but abide in it, and are as it were the fuel in it which ensures its immortality. This then is why the soul has the capacity for beholding God, and is its own way thereto, receiving not from without but from herself the knowledge and apprehension of the Word of God. ATHANASIUS<sup>16</sup>

Everything in nature points to termination followed by renewal. At the end of its life cycle, a caterpillar spins a chrysalis, which looks to the naked eye like dead matter. But when the time is right, a magnificent butterfly emerges from the remains. When, in turn, the butterfly dies, it may be eaten by a bird, which may eventually be eaten by a larger creature, and on and on in the biological chain, ultimately to return to the soil, fertilizing it to produce new life. Nothing in nature really dies but is just recycled (and no-one in any laboratory has ever created a living cell—all must come from pre-existing cells). Shall then man, created by and made in the image of God, when he dies, perish and crumble to nothing?

Upon death, the body is planted in the earth like a seed. At the Second Coming of Christ, from this seed a new body will rise to join the soul, which, since death, has been experiencing a foretaste of its eternal condition (much as those who dream during episodes of sleep may have many active experiences, though their bodies remain immobile upon their beds). This will be "the restoration of our nature to its original condition."<sup>17</sup> And so those whose lives on earth have shown faith in and love for God will be with Him forever, body and soul.

Through the story about the Rich Man and Lazarus, Christ teaches that “when a human being, whether sinner or righteous, dies, his soul is taken to a spiritual realm, where, according to the kind of life one has lived, one experiences pain or joy (Lk 16:22-25).”<sup>18</sup> The souls of both the righteous Lazarus and the unrighteous rich man are described as “continuing to exist after death in a conscious state, capable of feeling, thinking, and remembering.”

In the first life, of which God Himself became the Creator, there was presumably neither old age, nor infancy, nor the sufferings caused by the many kinds of diseases, nor any other type of bodily misery; for it is not likely that God created such things. Human nature was a divine sort of thing, before humanity started on the course of evil. All these things attacked us when evil entered our life. Therefore the life without evil will not need to be subject to the conditions which have happened because of evil.

...If a man wearing a ragged tunic should be denuded of his garment, he would no longer see on himself the ugliness of what was discarded. Likewise, when we have put off that dead and ugly garment which was made for us from irrational skins [mortality]...we throw off every part of our irrational skin along with the removal of the garment. These are the things which we have received from the irrational skin: sexual intercourse, conception, childbearing, dirt, lactation, nourishment, evacuation, gradual growth to maturity, the prime of life, old age, disease, and death. If we will not be wearing that skin, how shall we preserve the conditions which come from it.  
GREGORY OF NYSSA<sup>19</sup>

**(d). Why does verse 44 imply such a complete distinction between the natural and the spiritual body. Is it not possible to be spiritual in this life?** We can be spiritual in this life because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, received through the Sacrament of Chrismation. The level of spirituality we attain, however, depends upon the extent to which we cooperate with God’s grace by trying to avoid sin and practice holiness. After the Resurrection, there will be no more sin and decay to hamper our spiritual growth—which will continue eternally, for perfection is not static (see this study of 1 Corinthians 2:10-13).

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<sup>1</sup> Guthrie, p. 1071.

<sup>2</sup> Chrysostom, Schaff, “Homily XXXVIII,” Vol. XII, p. 229.

<sup>3</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, “Irenaeus against Heresies,” Vol. I, Book III, Chapter XV, p. 439.

<sup>4</sup> Schaff, “Homily XXXIX,” p. 238

<sup>5</sup> Mastrantonis, p. 148-152.

<sup>6</sup> Schaff, p. 240.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, “Homily XL,” p. 244.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, “Homily XLI,” p. 251.

<sup>9</sup> Nikolaos P. Vassiliades, *The Mystery of Death*, 503.

<sup>10</sup> Ware, *Way*, p. 62.

<sup>11</sup> Palmer, *etal*, p. 100-101.

<sup>12</sup> Schaff, “Homily XLII,” p. 255, fn3: “This reading is supported—by the Alexandrian and six other uncial MSS. It is found in several versions, and has the authority of Irenaeus, Origen, Basil, Tertullian, Cyprian, and other Fathers.”

<sup>13</sup> Golitzin, “The Ethical Discourses,” Vol. 2, p. 163.

<sup>14</sup> Schaff, p. 258.

<sup>15</sup> Elias, p. 181.

<sup>16</sup> Schaff and Wace, “Against the Heathen,” Vol. IV, p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> Catharine P. Roth, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Soul and the Resurrection*, p. 113.

<sup>18</sup> Constantine Cavarinos, *Immortality of the Soul*, p. 33.

<sup>19</sup> Roth, p. 113-114.