

The Intermediate State (Between Death and Resurrection)

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In London, England a tombstone has an unusual epitaph. A man named Solomon Peas gave instruction before he died to put these words on his tombstone:

“Beneath these clouds and beneath these trees,
Lies the body of Solomon Peas;
This is not Peas; it is only his pod;
Peas has shelled out and gone Home to God.”

Don't you wish your name was Solomon Peas so you could have that on your tombstone!

“Surely there's a Heaven
For folks who die this way;
And we'll go Home to see them
In Heaven some sweet day.”

What kind of existence does a person have between death and resurrection? Theologians throughout the years have grappled with this question. Some suggest that people exist in the dimension of the spirit world, while others suggest that some kind of intermediate body is given to people between death and their bodily resurrection, so they can continue to exist in a physical realm with senses and the necessary perceptions that we have as humans.

An intermediate body would be like going to the car garage, and getting a loaner car, while your car is being fixed. It would be like driving a car that an insurance company loaned to you until your own car is repaired and ready to go. Where does the Bible specifically teach that we are going to get an intermediate body, or a loaner body, before the resurrection? There is absolutely no Scripture that dogmatically asserts this or teaches that we will possess an intermediate body between our death and resurrection. Instead, the Bible suggests that we will live in the spirit world or spiritual dimension between death and resurrection.

What happens to us in the intermediate state, between our death and physical or bodily resurrection? What will our existence in Heaven be like before the resurrection and the eternal state begins? I believe the Bible teaches we will live in the spirit world between our death and bodily resurrection, and we will not get a body until the Rapture and resurrection.

There are two reasons why we will not receive an intermediate body.

A. The Bible speaks of bodies in connection with the resurrection program.

The Bible never directly speaks about receiving an intermediate body before the resurrection. All that Scripture reveals is that we will get our eternal body at the time of the resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:22-23

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.”

Paul is obviously speaking about the resurrection of the body and reveals that our bodily resurrection is linked with the time of Christ's coming, and not our time of death, and entrance into Heaven. The Bible is very clear on this. Paul based his hope of getting a new body at the time of Christ's coming. It was not something he expected to receive at his death, but at the Rapture, or Christ's coming.

Philippians 3:20-21

“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”

The receiving and transformation of our body takes place at the coming of Christ - not at the time of our death. This was the hope of Paul and this is what the Bible teaches. If the believer receives a body at the time of death, why is there a need for the resurrection of the physical body? I think this is one of the most important questions that remain unanswered by those who believe in an intermediate body. There is no direct Bible passage or reference that teaches we will receive a

temporary or intermediate body before the resurrection. The teaching of an intermediate body between death and resurrection is only an assumption.

Randy Alcorn, who has written a popular book on Heaven, suggests that we will have some kind of intermediate body. He says: "Just as the intermediate state is a bridge between life on the Old Earth and the New Earth, perhaps intermediate bodies, or at least a physical form of some sort, serve as bridges between our present bodies and our resurrection bodies." He goes on to try and prove his thesis in a rather lengthy discussion. However, I think there is a fly in his ointment, as we will see in our continuing study of this subject.

Some have misinterpreted what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, so let's take a look at these verses in our study. Instead of teaching about an intermediate body, Paul was actually teaching about our eternal body, which we will receive at the coming of Christ or the Rapture.

2 Corinthians 5:1-10 teaches this:

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

We can break these verses down in a very clear and understandable fashion.

1. The promise (vv. 1-4)

The promise that Paul gave to us is that we would receive an eternal body someday in the future – not a temporary body between death and resurrection. In these verses, Paul is contrasting his present mortal body, with all of its humiliation and shame, with the eternal body that he will someday receive at the Rapture. The present body is termed as a “tabernacle” (vv. 1, 4). A tent or tabernacle is a metaphor which describes the body in which we presently live. Paul had only two bodies in view (2 Corinthians 4:14-16) which was the temporal and the eternal body. He was contrasting the temporary body we have in this life with the eternal body we will receive someday.

This truth was designed to bring comfort and hope to the believer. What we see today taking place with our body on earth is only temporary. What we can look forward to is our eternal glorified body that we will receive someday at the Rapture. Paul has the resurrection of the human body in his thinking (“shall raise up us also by Jesus” – 2 Cor. 4:14). Therefore, the expressions “eternal weight of glory” (vs. 17) and “the things which are not seen” (vs. 18) have reference to the resurrection body and the joys of the eternal state.

When we stop and reflect on what lies ahead, our present trials and sufferings seem very temporary and small, in comparison to our future destiny. In other words, the future helps us to keep a proper perspective on the present. What we see today is not forever. It is only a “moment” (vs. 17) in comparison with the eternal body and glories that await us, when we enter our eternal state. Our present life is a drop in the bucket when placed alongside eternity! So do not despair; all will end well, or should we say, all will be well for eternity! The future glory outweighs and outshines all of our trials and tribulations in this life.

Romans 8:18

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

Let’s keep our perspective and remember what is coming! Our future glory, with the redemption of our body, a painless and deathless body, certainly outweighs the present trials that we face in our earthly bodies (“eternal weight of glory” – 2 Cor. 4:17). Since the future is so much greater, more glorious, and grander than the present life, it should overtake our hearts and make the present sufferings seem much more bearable.

Paul uses the term “weight” (2 Cor. 4:17) to describe the difference. When you put the present and the future on the scale, guess which one is greater and more glorious? Paul is teaching that the future prospect of an eternal body should help us to keep perspective on our trials in the present. The future should help us to see how temporary everything is in this life, in relationship to our bodily suffering and trials, and cause us to see trials in a different light and look forward to the eternal glory.

The “things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18) include Paul’s fullness of joy, his completed salvation (redemption of his body), his heavenly inheritance, and the presence of Jesus. By keeping these unseen realities in view, we can avoid being overcome by discouragement. In short, our earthly mortality is increasingly evident; outwardly we are wasting away (2 Cor. 4:16), but our eternal destiny is also increasingly evident and takes on new meaning to us, as we grow older in these earthly bodies (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

Paul now says in 2 Corinthians 5:1, “For we know” what the future holds. How do we know what lies in the future? It’s because we trust the Word of God. No Christian has to consult a fortune-teller, Ouija board, a spiritist, or a deck of cards to find out what the future holds, or what lies on the other side of death. We can know based upon the absolute standard and truth of God’s Word.

In 2 Corinthians 5:1 death is spoken of as the dissolving of the tent or body. The tent is taken down at the time of death. In other words, the body goes into the grave, whereas the spirit and soul of the believer go to be with the Lord (Heb. 12:23; 2 Cor. 5:10). Paul opens this chapter with the promise that if his earthly house should be destroyed (as a result of the sufferings mentioned in the preceding chapter), he knows he has a new “building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” Notice the distinction between tent and building in this verse. The temporary tent is taken down, but a new, permanent, and eternal house awaits the believer in the land beyond the skies! This is a building from God, in the sense that God is the One who gives it to us. Everything that we have comes from the Lord.

Paul mentions in 2 Corinthians 5:2 that “we groan” waiting for the eternal body that will someday be given to us from God (see also vs. 4). Groaning or sighing speaks of the inner longing and desire that we should possess, as we look forward

to our future glorified body (Rom. 8:22-26). Paul was not groaning because he was in a human body, but because he longed to receive his eternal glorified body and see Jesus Christ. He was groaning for glory! The same should be true about us. We should be groaning or longing to receive our final redemptive body which will be painless, deathless, and glorious beyond measure.

William MacDonald comments on 2 Corinthians 5:1: "It might sound from this verse as if a believer receives this building from God the moment he dies, but that is not the case. He does not get his glorified body until Christ comes back for His church (1 Thess. 4:13–18). What happens to the believer is this. At the time of death, his spirit and soul go to be with Christ where he is consciously enjoying the glories of heaven. His body is placed in the grave. At the time of the Lord's return, the dust will be raised from the grave, God will fashion it into a new, glorified body, and it will then be reunited with the spirit and the soul. Between death and Christ's coming for His saints, the believer might be said to be in a disembodied condition. However, this does not mean that he is not fully conscious of all the joy and bliss of heaven. He is!"

This is an accurate conclusion. The "house not made with hands" (2 Cor. 5:1) is described as "eternal in the heavens" which would not be true of an intermediate and temporary body. Paul is not talking about getting some kind of intermediate body after his death but receiving an "eternal" (1 Cor. 5:1) body someday for the eternal state.

The fact that it is "eternal" means it will never wear out. It is also a body that is designed for life "in the heavens" (heavenly realm where Christ dwells and exists – Heb. 4:14; 8:1). The believer's eternal destiny is linked to the heavenly realm and not the earthly realm. This means the heavenly city will be our home throughout eternity (Rev. 3:12; Heb. 12:22-23). The present universe will someday be destroyed by fire (2 Peter 3:10–12); therefore, our eternal destiny is always linked to Heaven – not the earth. Although the Church will share in the glories of the eternal state that is related to earth (Rev. 21:1-2; 24), our destiny, home, and calling will always be linked to the heavenly city and the place that Jesus has prepared for us (John 14:1-3).

Since the believer's future body is described as "eternal in the heavens," it would mean it will be a body that will no longer be subject to disease, decay, and death,

but one that will endure forever in our heavenly home. What a glorious destiny awaits God's saints!

Since Paul had just been describing the difference between the earthly and eternal body, which will we have in our eternal state (2 Cor. 4:14-18), the introduction of an intermediate body is therefore unlikely in chapter five. Paul had been addressing the difference between the mortal and immortal body in chapter 4; therefore, it's highly unlikely that he would talk about another temporary body that we would receive between death and resurrection. We already have our temporary body in this life; we won't get another one in the next life!

In 2 Corinthians 5:1-4, Paul is contrasting his mortal body ("mortality" - vs. 4) with immortality (an eternal body). Therefore, it seems clear from 2 Corinthians 5:4, that being in this tent, or tabernacle (2 Peter 1:13), and unclothed describe the condition of his human mortality, while being clothed ("clothed upon") depicts immortality (eternal state and eternal body), without specifying any intervening stages. Paul simply leaped from his present state to the eternal state in his thinking and teaching in this passage. He longed for the time when he would receive his eternal body and never again experience the pains and persecutions associated with his mortal body.

Robert Gromacki makes this interesting observation:

"The usage in this context probably means that Paul wanted to be alive when the Lord returned. In that way, the new body could be put on right over the old one. Earlier, Paul did say: "... we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:52-53)."

Paul knew that life would be better in the eternal state and he desired that he would receive his new set of clothing (immortal body) to replace his naked or shameful state in the present (mortal body). Of course, this could only happen if Christ returned in his lifetime. This was his intense desire. He wanted his mortal state (earthly body) to be "swallowed up" (1 Cor. 5:4) by the immortal state (glorified body). He wrote formerly: "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54).

The metaphors “a building of God, and house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor. 5:1) and “our house which is from heaven” (2 Cor. 5:2) clearly refer to the glorified body that Paul would receive someday. The fact that this body is “eternal” (2 Cor. 5:1) would indicate that it cannot be an intermediate body that is given to us between death and resurrection; rather, Paul was looking forward to receiving his eternal, glorified body. In short, Paul is not talking about a physical body that he will possess between death and the resurrection but a physical body that he will eventually possess for the eternal state.

The description of our present mortal state is described as being “naked” (vs. 3) and “unclothed” (vs. 4) where the eternal body is compared to a new set of clothing and being properly clothed (“clothed upon” - vv. 2, 4). Once again, some have suggested from this verse (“we shall not be found naked”) that Paul is talking about an intermediate body between death and resurrection. However, Paul is viewing his nakedness from the perspective of this life – not his condition in the next life. Paul’s present body is portrayed as being naked, shameful, or humiliating. Our present bodies with their sickness, frailties, and oldness are described elsewhere as something which is shameful (“vile body” or body of humiliation and shame - Phil. 3:21).

So, Paul compares the shame of the present mortal body to a naked body (2 Cor. 5:3). In essence, he promises that when we receive the new set of clothing (the eternal body), we will no longer have this lowly, humiliating, and shameful body. When we get our new body, we will lose all the present shame we possess in these bodies (“It doth not yet appear what we shall be” – 1 John 3:2). Getting our new body is explained as receiving a set of clothing that covers the present humiliation, shame, and nakedness of our present body. The Bible teaches that “mortality,” or the death of our mortal body, will “be swallowed up of life” or “by life” (2 Cor. 5:4), when we receive our immortal and imperishable bodies (Phil. 3:21). As stated elsewhere, “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54). What a day it will be! What an eternity it will be!

There is no talk of any intermediate body in any of these verses when they are understood in the context of Paul’s whole argument. It’s clear that Paul had only two conditions in view, since 2 Corinthians 4:16, the temporal body and the eternal body that we will possess in our eternal state. The introduction of a third intermediate or temporary body is therefore not in Paul’s thinking.

2. The payment (vs. 5)

It's equally encouraging, that right now God is working with us, in order to make us more like Jesus Christ ("now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing"). In other words, God has already, in a small way, begun the transforming process, which will one day be complete, when we possess a heavenly body and perfect Christlikeness. However, the pledge or surety of this consummation is the Holy Spirit, whose abiding presence and life-changing work (2 Cor. 3:18), begins the transformation process, and guarantees the completion of God's gracious salvation, which is the redemption of our body and perfect Christlikeness, in a body that will be designed for eternity (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 4:30).

Paul reveals to us that a down payment has been made which reassures us of receiving our eternal body. The expression "earnest of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 5:5) speaks of the Holy Spirit as being a down payment of a much greater glory that awaits us in the future, which is a redeemed body that will be sinless and painless, a body and transformation that will make us like Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 4:30

"And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

Beloved, we have the pledge, or deposit, so we can be sure the rest is coming! This is a sealed deal! The Spirit's presence and transformation today is like a down payment to a greater glory that is coming – a perfect eternal body that will be sinless, painless, and deathless. The Spirit's presence in us today produces character transformation. This should give us confidence that God will transform us completely in the future when our bodies are redeemed! Since we have been given the deposit, we will receive the final payment – an eternal body.

3. The persuasion (vv. 6-8)

Whenever you see the word "Therefore" determine what it is therefore. Paul links these verses to what was stated before about the down payment of the Holy Spirit's presence and the reassurance of our future resurrection and eternal body. In these verses, we see the recurring word "confidence," which means Paul was persuaded that he would someday be present with Jesus Christ in Heaven, with a

new glorified body. The down payment of the Holy Spirit reassures us of this future destiny (Eph. 4:30).

The expression “at home in the body” (2 Cor. 5:6) means to dwell in the earthly tent (2 Cor. 5:1), to be outwardly wasting away (2 Cor. 4:16), and to be in a state of mortality away from the immediate presence of the Lord (“absent from the Lord” – 2 Cor. 5:6; see also 1 Cor. 13:12). While we reside in our present earthly bodies, we are not in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, who resides in Heaven. In light of this, the translators then remind us that we need to walk by faith instead of by sight (vs. 7). Of course, when we look at our present bodies, they are a sight to behold! However, it is equally true we can’t see Jesus Christ face to face in this life. Nevertheless, when we walk by faith, we know that we will get a new body someday, be delivered from all of our earthly pains and problems and see Jesus Christ face to face. This is brought out in the next verse.

Paul says we can also be “confident” or persuaded that when we are “absent from the body” (2 Cor. 5:8), we will be “present with the Lord” in Heaven. Paul could be referring to the intermediate state between death and resurrection (Phil. 1:21-23), when the human spirit does not yet possess a body in which to reside (James 2:26; Heb. 12:23), or he could be staying with his previous theme, and referencing the eternal state with Christ, the time when he will possess a new eternal body in the heavenly city (“eternal in the heavens” - 1 Cor. 5:1).

In this passage, Paul seems to be leaping from his present state to the eternal state. In other words, when the Rapture takes place, Paul knew that in a moment’s time, he would discard his old body and receive his new, eternal, glorified body and be in the presence of Jesus Christ forever (1 Cor. 15:51-52; John 14:1-3). The mention of being “accepted of him” (2 Cor. 5:9), and the Judgment Seat of Christ in 2 Corinthians 5:10, gives further confirmation to this interpretation. Paul was looking forward (“willing” – 2 Cor. 5:8) to leaving this present world and body behind so he could see Christ at the Rapture, which would be the time of examination for the Church (2 Cor. 5:10).

The apostle wanted to be in the presence of Jesus Christ. Again, this could be achieved through one of two ways: by death (Phil. 1:21-23), or by the return of Christ (1 Thess. 2:19). The confidence and anticipated joy of seeing the Savior in the Rapture, receiving a new body, and entering his eternal state (2 Cor. 4:18),

seems to be a probable interpretation of what it means, when Paul anticipated being “present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8). He longed to be clothed with the new body (1 Cor. 5:4) and be with Christ forever in the eternal state – his heavenly home (1 Cor. 5:1).

Someone said:

“There are only two places the Christian can be: in the body or with the Lord.”

It’s true, if we are in this present body, we can’t be with the Lord; however, someday we are going to be with Christ forever and possess an eternal body like His (1 John 3:2). Being “present with the Lord” (at home with the Lord) implies a closer fellowship with Christ than we experience now as well as closer proximity to Him. This is something that is promised in view of the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:17 – “to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord”). It is also something that is promised in the eternal state (Rev. 21:3 – “the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them”). Paul may ultimately be looking forward to the glorified body and eternal state by this statement (“present with the Lord”). He may once again be jumping from his mortal state to the eternal state, as he stated earlier (2 Cor. 5:4 – “that mortality might be swallowed up of life”).

Paul had what Bernard calls “A case of heavenly homesickness.” Our citizenship, inheritance, and Savior are all in heaven, so why shouldn’t we want to be there (Phil. 3:20; 1 Peter 1:4)? The truth is this; no person will receive a body until the time of resurrection. This is the time when God will give bodies to His saints. Until then, we will live and exist in Heaven within the spirit world.

B. The Bible speaks of people without bodies before the resurrection.

The Book of Revelation, and other Biblical passages, gives some added confirmation about the immaterial part of man’s existence in Heaven between a person’s death and bodily resurrection. Let me talk about this for a few moments. What will we be like between our time of death, when the spirit leaves our body (James 2:26), and the time we receive a new body at the Rapture (Phil. 3:20-21)?

Revelation 6:9 provides us with this information:

“And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held.”

John witnessed the souls of people in Heaven. Some suggest that the word “soul” in this verse has reference to the total physical and spiritual existence of people, including the body, as it sometimes does in the Bible (Job 7:15; Ezek. 18:4; Acts 2:41; 27:37; Rom. 13:1; 1 Pet. 3:20; Rev. 20:4). In other words, the Bible sometimes will view people in their present earthly bodies as souls; therefore, some suggest that the “souls” in this Bible reference refers to the bodily existence of people after death. However, the term “souls” can also refer to just the immaterial part of human existence and many times this is the meaning or understanding of the word in Scripture (Matt. 10:28; 11:29; Mark 12:30; 1 Pet. 1:9; Heb. 4:12).

Since these people were seen to be killed or “slain” (Rev. 6:9) and their resurrection has not yet occurred, as taught and witnessed by John in Revelation 20:4, it would suggest that these souls are referencing the immaterial, or invisible part of their human existence. This is a reference to the immaterial part of their human existence which lives on after death.

Revelation 6:11 continues to speak about the martyred dead in Heaven: “And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.”

Some argue, from this verse, for an intermediate body between death and resurrection, since immaterial souls in the spirit world cannot wear robes. Who says so? God’s Word doesn’t say this. We simply don’t understand everything about the spirit world that surrounds us, or the spirit world in the next life. Since these martyrs had been slain, they were without physical bodies, and yet they were given white robes to wear. In Revelation, the wearing of a white robe did not require a resurrection body, as some suggest and use as an argument for an intermediate body (see also Revelation 7:13-14).

Randy Alcorn states:

“Disembodied spirits don’t wear robes.”

Of course, this is Alcorn's reasoning but not God's. I will believe what the Bible says on this matter! Our problem is that we are so earthbound to physical things, that we can't think in the heavenly, or spiritual dimension, and believe that an entire world exists and operates apart from the physical. In these verses, we clearly see, once again, that those who are martyred are seen wearing robes even before their resurrection. Even bodiless souls can wear a robe in the spirit world in the same way that angels, who are spirit beings (Heb. 1:14), can wear white apparel (Acts 1:10). It's evident that the soul, or the immaterial part of man's human existence, lives on after death, without a physical body.

Philippians 1:23

"For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better."

Paul recognized that when he died, he would "depart" from his body and exist in the spirit world apart from a physical body. The Bible never mentions about entering into another temporary or intermediate body after the time of death. What would God do with these bodies when it's time for His saints to be raised?

2 Corinthians 5:8 again states:

"We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."

As previously mentioned, Paul may be talking about the time his spirit will depart from his body at death and immediately be with the Lord in Heaven. However, Paul could also be staying with his previous theme and referencing the eternal state with Christ, the time when he will possess a new eternal body in the heavenly city, a body which is said to be "eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1). If this is the case, Paul would never be "unclothed" but immediately receive his eternal body at the Rapture – absent from his earthly body but present with the Lord in a new body.

You see, Paul was looking forward to the Rapture and receiving his new and eternal body at the coming of Christ. At the Rapture, it would be like taking off the old body, but immediately getting a new and eternal body. When raptured, we will immediately leave and be absent from our earthly body, but at the same time, we would be present with the Lord in our new and eternal body, which

would replace the old and worn-out body that we now have. Like Paul, we should be “earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven” (2 Cor. 5:2).

Nevertheless, if Paul in this verse is suggesting that he enters Heaven after his death, then this reference also points to his soul departing from his body. Again, there is no mention of an intermediate or temporary body that we receive after our death. The soul departs from the body at the time of death and lives on without the vehicle of a human body. This seems to be what Paul taught in the epistles. Our body is made for an earthly existence and senses, but our eternal soul is designed to exist in a spiritual world that can possess similar senses and stimuli (human responses and activities).

In all probability, Paul was teaching us that receiving a new body at the time of the Rapture would be like putting on a new set of clothing (“so that being clothed we shall not be found naked” - 2 Cor. 5:3). Paul did not expect to be without a body (“not for that we should be unclothed – 2 Cor. 5:4) which means he did not expect to live in the spirit world after he dies because he was looking for Jesus to return (Phil. 3:20-21), who would be like a divine seamstress, and give him and each one of us a new and eternal body at the Rapture. In other words, Paul was not looking to die but to be changed in a moment and meet the Savior at His coming (1 Cor. 15:51-52).

The fact that Paul looked forward to a body that was “eternal” (2 Cor. 5:1) argues against receiving some kind of temporary body between death and resurrection. The promise that Paul gives to us in this passage is that we would receive an eternal body someday in the future – not a temporary body between death and resurrection. We are only getting one body in the future – not two. We don’t need a temporary body to hold us over until the resurrection. Here is the point. We will live in the realm of the spirit world until we receive our body at the Rapture.

Hebrews 12:22-23 goes on to speak about human spirits in Heaven:

“But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.”

In this heavenly scene, which is prior to the resurrection, spirits are seen residing in Heaven and not bodies. There is no mention of any form of a physical body. People exist in the spirit world prior to the resurrection. However, Randy Alcorn objects to spirits of people residing in Heaven, when he states: “It appears that we are not essentially spirits who inhabit bodies, but we are essentially as much physical as we are spiritual. We cannot be fully human without both a spirit and body.”

It’s true that human beings were created to possess a body. This is why God has a resurrection program! We will receive an eternal body at the time of the resurrection. However, it is wrong to conclude that we will only be half human, if we don’t possess a human body, prior to the resurrection. This is conjecture and not a Biblical fact. The spirit within us is our true human existence and it’s the spirit that lives on after death in the spirit world. This teaching is not the result of Platonic teaching or the teaching of Plato, the Greek philosopher, as Alcorn repeatedly suggests in his book on Heaven (page 52, 58).

Alcorn reasons: “God intends for our bodies to last as long as our souls. Those who believe in Platonism, or in the preexistent spirits, see a disembodied soul as natural and even desirable. The Bible sees it as unnatural and undesirable” (pp. 111). In response, the Bible teaches very clearly that we will live in the spirit world after death until the resurrection. To liken this to Platonic philosophy is doing a great injustice to what God’s Word teaches about the afterlife. However, Alcorn is correct when he states that God designed man to live with a body (Gen. 2:7), and this is why man will receive a new body at the resurrection and for the eternal state.

The Scriptures teach in both Old and New Testaments that the spirit lives on after death without the human body and the body is lost until the resurrection.

Ecclesiastes 12:7

“Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.”

Job 19:25

“For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.”

Solomon and Job give a very clear witness regarding the departure of the human spirit from the body and the body awaiting a future resurrection. There is not mention or any indication that they would receive a human body until the resurrection. Being joined with their body was something that would occur way off in the future.

James spoke of the spirit leaving the body at the time of death (James 2:26). Paul spoke about Jesus reuniting the spirit with the body at the coming of Christ (1 Thess. 4:14) and John spoke about the dead not receiving a body until the resurrection (Rev. 20:5) and the reuniting of the spirits of the lost with their bodies for the final judgment (Rev. 20:13-14). Jesus did not possess a body between death and the resurrection (John 19:30; John 2:19-21) and neither will we. These Bible verses teach that we will not possess a human body between death and His bodily resurrection.

It's clear that we will not possess a physical body in the intermediate state since the Bible speaks of spirits residing in Heaven – not bodies. The spirit is another aspect of man's immaterial nature or constitutional makeup. The spirit is the life-principle within man that lives on after death in the spirit world. Man is both soul and spirit (1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 4:12) and this is what makes the body animated or possess life. The true life of every person resides within their body and this is why James declared that “the body without the spirit is dead” (James 2:26).

Revelation 15:2 presents another similar case of the immaterial part of man existing after death. “And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.”

Again, these are martyred saints who are not yet resurrected. They are, therefore, seen as invisible souls, which the human eye cannot see, and yet they exist in the spirit world beyond the grave. This apocalyptic scene, along with Revelation 6:9,

teach that those who were martyred during the future Tribulation Period will experience conscious bliss in Heaven, prior to their bodily resurrection. Apparently, the curtain or veil was pulled back and John was given a rare glimpse into the spirit world. He was able to see the immaterial part of these saints before their resurrection. This would also be true in other verses of the apocalypse dealing with angelic beings and battles where John witnessed angels fighting and existing in the spirit world (Rev. 12:7-9; 20:1-2).

In spite of the fact that angels (spirit beings) do not have physical bodies (“Who maketh his angels spirits” – Heb. 1:7), the Bible ascribes wings, faces, feet, and hands to them (Isa. 6:2, 6; Rev. 10:1-2, 5, 8, 10) and portrays them wearing clothing (Matt. 28:2-3; Mark 16:5; Acts 1:10; Rev. 15:6), even in the spirit world. We discover when looking at Scripture that angels wear clothing and they have personal appearance and capabilities that are similar to the physical world.

What is also interesting to note is that everywhere the immaterial or invisible part of man is seen, following death, the person is also found experiencing normal senses and functions that pertain to our present experience connected with our bodies (Luke 16:23-31; Rev. 6:9; 7:14-15).

When the rich man of Luke 16 died, his body was buried (Luke 16:22), but his soul went to hell (Luke 16:23). Even though his soul was without its body, Jesus ascribed eyes (Luke 16:23) and a tongue (Luke 16:24) to his bodiless soul. This means that in between death and resurrection we will be able to see and function in another world, the unseen spirit world, with the senses that we now possess in our present physical world. We will be able to see things, feel things, and wear things (“robes” – Rev. 6:11; 7:14) and function normally, as we do today; however, in another spiritual dimension. Beloved, we’ll understand it better by and by!

“By and by, when the morning comes,
All the saints of God are gathering home.
We will tell the story how we've overcome
We will understand it better by and by.”

Many feel that a human body-grid or some kind of body mechanism is always needed, so a person can receive external stimuli, communicate, and transmit thoughts, emotions, and decisions. But Scripture seems to teach otherwise. It can

be verified in Scripture that the spirit world has all of these perceptions and abilities to transmit expressions, feelings, and thoughts without possessing an actual body structure. Our spiritual state between death and resurrection will not appear any different in respect to perception, function, feelings and reality, even though we enter into another type of world and sphere of existence. The half has not been told!

In summary, during the afterlife, prior to the resurrection, we will be a spirit being that does not possess a physical body (Heb. 12:23; Acts 7:59-60; Phil. 1:21-23; Rev. 6:9; 15:2; Eccl. 12:7). However, it's equally clear that we will possess some kind of observable structure in the next life (prior to physical resurrection) that will be recognizable and capable of feeling, thinking, volition, and outward stimuli (Rev. 6:9-10; 7:14-15; Luke 16:22-24; Rev. 12:7). We will possess some kind of spiritual structure, that in some sense, relates to our earthly bodies and senses, which we now occupy, but we will exist in the spiritual dimension or spirit world.

The fact that people after death, prior to the resurrection, could remember and know things, or experience what seems to be physical stimuli (physical activity and response), does not indicate we will have a physical body like we have today, but that the human spirit of these people will be able to function, as their bodies did on earth, when they were in their human existence. The fact that people in the afterlife, prior to resurrection, fellowship together, know one another, speak, possess memory, experience feeling and pain, worship, and wear clothing (Gen. 15:15; Gen. 25:8; 49:33; 2 Sam. 12:23; Luke 9:30; 16:24-25; Rev. 6:9; 7:14-15; 15:2-4) indicates that there will be recognition and structure that does exist in the spiritual dimension of our human existence. As spirit beings, we will be recognizable and possess all of the sensory perceptions we had on earth with our physical bodies, and yet we will exist in another dimension, which does not require a physical body.

Lehman Strauss handles this difficulty by saying:

“After death the spirit is clothed with a spirit body that is recognizable.”

In some sense this is true; since we have already seen that the spirit world can recognize one another and do battle with one another (Jude 9; Rev. 12:7). There is obviously some kind of observable structure even in the spiritual or immaterial world that is recognizable by spirit beings. The same would be true for the spirits

of departed saints who have gone to Heaven (Heb. 12:23). This is why we will know one another in Heaven even prior to the resurrection of our human bodies.

We read about the appearance of the deceased Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. Luke 9:30 says, "And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias." At first, this would seem to discredit the notion that there will be no bodies in between death and the resurrection. However, once again, we must recall how even spirit beings can function with the senses, and capabilities that we have in the material world, and possess some type of form and substance, while still existing in the spiritual dimension (Rev. 12:7-8). Apparently, the disciples were given a rare glimpse into the spirit world, where they could visibly see how spirit beings function and look in the next life. The curtain was drawn back and they were given the privilege of seeing these two men.

A similar occurrence took place in the days of Elisha. The eyes of Elisha's servant were open to the spirit world. In 2 Kings 6:16-17, Elisha spoke to his fearful servant: "And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

This was a heavenly cavalry of horses and angels waiting to destroy the enemies that were sent against Elisha. There is a whole other world that exists outside our world of human stimuli, and a world that functions on the same basis as we do, but in a whole different spiritual dimension. Someday, we will see this world on the other side. Of course, we cannot see the spirit world functioning on the present side of our human existence; however, the spirit world beyond the grave does possess characteristics which are similar to the ones we have in our physical state, and we will someday function in the spirit world in a similar way that we function today.

Many Christians have difficulty in knowing how we can, if in spirit-form only, enjoy the things of Heaven, since our bodies are not there also. But we must again remember that angels are "ministering spirits" (Heb. 1:14) and they move about to serve God and enjoy their spiritual existence. We read about angels

experiencing joy (Luke 15:10), worshipping the Lord (Rev. 5:11-12), and speaking and communicating (Luke 1:26). I mention these facts, not to suggest that we will become angels in the afterlife, but that spirit beings are rational beings that can communicate to others, experience joy, and serve the Lord, even though they do not possess a body as we do now. The same will be true for the departed believer in the afterlife.

2 Corinthians 12:2-3

“I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth).”

The comments of the translators tried to capture Paul’s experience in Heaven. Perhaps they give us a sense of what Paul experienced and what we will experience prior to our bodily resurrection. In Paul’s trance-like experience, he was taken into Heaven, but could not determine whether he was in his body, or outside the realm of his physical body. Perhaps this experience is similar to the way it will be for the believer in the afterlife, prior to our bodily resurrection. We will have the sense of living in a body, but we will not possess an actual body until the resurrection (John 5:28-29).

We can rest assured that the spirit and soul (immaterial part of man’s human existence) departs to be with Christ at the time of death (2 Cor. 5:8). Death essentially means separation, and at the time of death, the body is separated from the spirit (James 2:26), or from the immaterial part of man. The body goes into the ground (Eccl. 12:7) and is termed as sleeping (1 Cor. 15:20), awaiting a future resurrection (1 Cor. 15:52; Thess. 4:16), whereas the spirit goes to Heaven (Heb. 12:23) to be with the Christ, which is “far better” (Phil. 1:23). It’s far better in the Better Land!

Old Brother Baxter had a long, hard illness. On his last day alive, someone came to him and said, "How are you doing?" He said, "I'm almost well." Amen! What a glorious destiny and prospect we have as God’s saints. The best is yet to come!