

A Critique of the Corporate Body View of the Resurrection of the Dead

Part 1

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I have been a believer in fulfilled prophecy for over nine years now. At the beginning of my journey, the two biggest hurdles to overcome as a partial preterist were the resurrection of the dead and the millennium. I began to study these two items deeply, and immediately after accepting the one and only second coming of Christ in AD 70, I studied online with all the major public proponents of what is called the “Corporate Body View” (hereafter, “CBV”) of the resurrection. The CBV teaches that the “resurrection of the dead,” specifically in texts like 1 Corinthians 15, does not refer to individual dead people departing Hades, but to the corporate body of saints, both alive and dead, coming out of Judaism (a ministration of death; 2 Cor 3:6-7) and into the church or the “body” of Christ. I quickly adopted this view because it seemed tremendously logical and straightforward. I immersed myself into the works of Max King, who was considered to have written the definitive work explaining a corporate body view of the resurrection of the dead. I have posted a few articles online on the subject, and spoken at three different Preterist Pilgrim Weekends on the subject of resurrection.

As I continued to study these subjects and engage other preterists with differing views on the resurrection, I began to see problems with many of the arguments used to defend the CBV. Over the next few months I will be writing a series of articles outlining these problems and offering what I believe to be a solution. This first article will discuss the phrase “our body.”

The CBV argues that the phrase “our body” (a plural possessive pronoun *our* with a singular noun *body*) as used by Paul in resurrection-related passages indicates that only a corporate body resurrection can be in view and that numerous individual bodies cannot be in view. This view is based on a basic Greek grammar rule which states that, generally, pronouns and nouns should agree in number. Therefore, if the noun “body” is singular following a plural pronoun such as “our,” then the meaning is to be understood as a single corporate “body” (group, collective) to which everyone who is addressed belongs.

However, there are exceptions to this Greek rule, and context determines how the rule is applied. In koine Greek it was possible to use a plural possessive pronoun with a singular noun in order to put emphasis on the noun. This usage was not meant to communicate the existence of only one noun collectively for all those represented by the plural pronoun. I will demonstrate this by looking at some advanced Greek Grammars and citing some scriptural examples.

Wallace¹ lists several categories of pronoun/noun number agreement: “collective singular subjects, compound subjects, indefinite plurals, and categorical plurals.” Both Robertson² and Blass and Debrunner³ discuss this phenomenon, calling them “idiomatic plurals and singulars,” and *constructio ad sensum* (“construction according to the sense”), respectively. Turner states that using a plural pronoun with a singular noun in order to put emphasis on the noun, yet not denying the plurality of the noun, was a common Hebraism: “Contrary to normal Greek and Latin practice, the NT sometimes follows the Aramaic and Hebrew preference for a *distributive singular*. Something belonging to each person in a group is placed in the singular: as in, *to soma human* (1 Cor. 6:19) and *en te kardia auton* (Luke 1:66).”⁴

Therefore, according to the rules of grammar, it wouldn’t be wrong to first consider the singular noun option, but the plural noun should also be considered; it could go either way based on context. The words “our (plural) body (singular)” in and of themselves do not prove that a single corporate body is in view.

The primary singular body CBV texts are: Romans 8:23 (NASB) “*And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body*”; and Philippians 3:21 (NASB) “*who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.*”

“Flesh” (Greek *sarx*) is a word used by Paul which is often argued by CBV advocates to be a mode of existence based on the Law. However, “the flesh” had a primary meaning other than “covenantal mode of existence” both in the ancient Greek and in Paul’s writings. According to the highly respected scholar F.F. Bruce⁵, “flesh” primarily referred to human nature, and was seen as the locus of temptation and sin; not necessarily literally in biological tissue, but more holistically in the individual as a whole person. That is, when one would say “his mind was set on the flesh” they meant he was living according to his own human nature, not brought under control by the mind of God through His Spirit (e.g. Gal. 5:16-21).

Of course, a corporate solidarity existed for those who were under the Law, for they all shared the same fate and were all under the same covenant. But the meaning of “in the flesh” should not be stretched beyond its normal use in order to exclude that normal usage—that is, it would be incorrect to define the meaning of “in the flesh” as only a covenantal “mode of existence” to the exclusion of the individual’s human nature as sinful. The human nature is general and primary; the covenantal mode of existence is specific within that general category. One text that makes this point clear is Galatians 2:18-20.

“For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (ESV)

It is clear here that being under the law is not the same as being in the flesh, since Paul said that he died to the law yet was still in the flesh. Furthermore, Gentiles who had not formerly known God, nor were in a covenantal mode of existence under the Law, were also said to be “in the flesh” (see Gal 4:8-9 with 5:13ff). So, it might be better stated that being “in the flesh” is primarily talking about being “human.” What is most problematic however to the single corporate-body view of Romans 8:23 is the plurality of individuals discussed throughout that chapter, especially vv. 11-14. Verse 11 is powerful: ...*will also give life to your mortal bodies.*” (NASB)

Contrary to the standard CBV, contextually, “deeds of the body” (v. 13) cannot be the deeds of multiple corporate bodies (such as of Moses, Adam, or Christ) being put to death, but rather must be the individual deeds of each person. There were individuals who were or were not putting to death their own sinful deeds, with the result (v. 13) that some would live (spiritually) and some would die (spiritually). This is seen clearly by Paul’s use of “so then” (Greek *ara*) in 8:12, which is a particle denoting inference, the drawing of a decisive conclusion regarding the mortal bodies Paul has in view.

Since each individual Roman believer had been set free from the law of sin and death, they each individually, then, must not live according to the sinful human nature aroused by the law. Why? Because as we see from vv. 16-17, (a) the Spirit was within each of them, and (b) they were about to suffer with Christ through the great persecution, which would (c) result in each one who overcame being glorified with Christ.

Concordantly, the CBV misses or de-emphasizes the theme of martyrdom in this chapter. The second half of Romans 8 (vv. 18-39) is built around a promise to people (in Rome) about to be martyred under the persecution of Nero, and is meant to teach them that when they are martyred they will be glorified like Christ was after His martyrdom. This Neronian persecution, which would follow the Jewish persecution they were currently suffering, was the “suffering” and “pains of childbirth” spoken of in Romans 8:18, 22 (cf. Matt 24:7-9).

So, when we get to the phrase “redemption of our body” (8:23), a singular noun with a plural pronoun, it does not prove that ONLY one body (i.e. a corporate body) would be raised. Individual “bodies” is what Paul meant in this chapter when he used the word “soma,” based on its use in verse 11 (“your mortal bodies”). Paul would be using the

idiomatic plural here, a Hebraic construction, or *constructio ad sensum* (construction according to the sense) described above.

The plural nouns “sons,” “heirs,” “hearts,” and “saints” found in Romans 8 applied to each individual Christian; furthermore, we also see in vv. 26-27 that the promise was that the Spirit would help each individual person in their weakness, searching each individual’s heart.

This was not a promise concerning the weakness of a corporate body (notice “our weakness” is a plural pronoun with a singular noun); that would be incredibly impotent and impersonal with the upcoming tribulation. Rather, it was to the “hearts” (plural) of the “saints” (plural). This is confirmed in vv. 35-36.

The second primary text for a singular corporate body resurrection is Philippians 3:21, which mentions the transformation of “our lowly body.” King identified Phil. 3:21 as a clear text that showed that “body” meant a corporate group, not the individual person⁶.

I see three problems with a corporate body view here. First, what is the lowly body? The phrase “lowly body” (ESV), “vile body” (KJV), “body of our humble state” (NASB) in Greek is *soma tes tapeinoseos*, which literally is “body of our humiliation.” King claims that the “lowly body” is the corporate body of Israel to which the Apostle and other Jews were still in the process of dying⁷. This is argued primarily because Paul discussed the Judaizing “dogs” earlier in Philippians 3, and expressed his historic solidarity with Israel and his movement out of the Law of Moses. King argues:

*“Since the law set forth a mode of somatic existence wherein sin and death were able to reign, it follows that victory through Christ is by means of a new mode of existence wherein life and righteousness reign. We conclude, therefore, that (1) somatic change is determined by a change in one’s mode of existence, (2) this is accomplished through a change from the Old to the New covenant, (3) covenantal change was the specific design of Christ’s pre-end-of-the-age reign, and (4) from that viewpoint, Paul ties somatic change in v. 21 to the **working** of Christ.”*
[Emphasis King’s]⁸

While I disagree with King’s interpretation of this text as applied to the term “body,” I am not denying the overlapping of covenants during this transition period, or Paul’s past as a Jew under the Law. The problem for King is there are no actual written statements by New Testament authors or any direct, concrete evidence that covenantal change equates with somatic change. This is a theory, strung together on facts assumed to connect to each other. This will become clearer as we continue.

One of the strengths of preterism is that it honors the biblical principle of audience relevance when interpreting passages. Hence, we must ascertain the audience intended by the pronouns in our text. The pronoun “our” in Philippians 3:20 contextually can only be Paul’s entire audience in Philippi as v. 15 demonstrates by Paul’s use of “us” and “you.”

From the best info scholars have gathered, the church in Philippi was composed of Jews and Greeks. The text does not indicate two lowly corporate bodies (one for Jews and the other for Gentiles), so the context of “our” being all of Paul’s audience (both Jews and Greeks) in Philippi means it can’t be the idea of a corporate body to old covenant Israel, since the Greeks were never in the old covenant body of Moses (cf. Eph 2:11-12).

Some CBV advocates say the “body of humiliation” is not the old covenant body of Moses as King specified, but rather is the Body of Christ, the Church, which did contain both Jews and Gentiles. If the “lowly body” was the Church/the Body of Christ, then it seems to contradict other more specific passages about the Church being “pure” (2 Cor 11:2), “spotless, holy, without blemish” (Eph 5:25-27), “a holy nation” (1 Peter 2:4-9). None of those references indicate that the body of Christ was “lowly” or of “humble state”; rather, they state the opposite.

Leaving the discussion on the “lowly body” for a brief moment, I’d like to look at the context of the entire Philippian epistle, which I believe shows that the best meaning of “lowly body” is the individual person. Every other instance of this word “lowly” (Greek *tapeinosei*)—found three other times in the New Testament—refers to specific individuals found in a state of humiliation (see Luke 1:48; Acts 8:33; James 1:10). Here, in Philippians 3:21, the form of this word is a noun. The verb form of this word, *etapeinosen*, is used of Jesus just one chapter earlier in Philippians 2:6-8:

“. . . who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (ESV)

Notice that the verb points to Jesus’ humble state as a “human.” This fits with every other New Testament use of this word. The most logical way to determine this word’s meaning is to see how Paul used it elsewhere in the same letter. As we have already seen, he used it in reference to Jesus’ “human form,” which leads to the simple conclusion that Paul was referring to the individual human, not the Church, when he used the phrase “lowly body.”

Second, notice in the preceding verse (3:20) the location of both the citizenship and the Savior: “heaven.” The most straightforward contextual explanation is that the individual bodies of the saints in Philippi would be transformed into the same type of heavenly body as Jesus possessed in heaven. In refutation of this, CBV advocates usually point out the

corporate solidarity Paul had as a Jew with the Law and the body of Moses from previous verses in chapter 3. While Paul certainly identified as belonging to that community, he also thoroughly repudiated it (3:7-8). Paul then made a personal plea for his own individual resurrection: “*that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead*” (3:11). One’s covenantal status surely dictated the end result in the resurrection, but this does not negate the individual tone clearly present in this text.

At this point, CBV advocates usually counter-argue (as I have done in the past) that the fact that Paul would say he hoped “*by any means possible*” to “*attain the resurrection,*” followed by “*not that I’ve already obtained it,*” would be an odd thing to say if he is talking about a corpse resurrection, or even an invisible individual bodily resurrection out of Hades, since it would be obvious that he hadn’t obtained it yet because he was still living! And, if it was the general resurrection of the dead, doesn’t everyone (both the just and the unjust) participate in it to be judged? This being true, why would Paul “hope” to be part of something over which he had no choice?

While I am certainly not arguing for a resurrection of individual corpses, I do believe that Paul used rhetoric designed to demonstrate that even in his imprisonment, he felt he hadn’t yet “completed the race” of his apostolic ministry, as it were. This seems to reflect some sort of maturity benchmark. Notice 2 Timothy, which was written during Paul’s last imprisonment before his death:

“Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” (2 Timothy 2:3-10 ESV)

Though the Greek word here for “may obtain” is not exactly the same as it is for “may attain” in Philippians 3:11-12, it is very similar in meaning and communicates the same idea. This passage clearly describes striving for maturity and holiness as striving for salvation and the attainment of glory, just as Paul did in Philippians 3. “Striving” is very uncomfortable for evangelicals based on our “grace vs. works” mentality. But we know from what we read above that Paul clearly saw the need to continue to strive for holiness and perfection “in order to attain” both resurrection and salvation.

First John 3 also emphasizes purity in connection with seeing Christ, which I believe is connected with the idea of seeing God “face to face”:

“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.” (1 John 3:2-3 ESV)

Notice the emphasis on purifying oneself. This connects with the striving theme above. I might also note here that this passage seems to strongly indicate a transformation of each/all of the children into being like Christ at His Parousia, rather than a legal transformation of a corporate body. This seems intuitively clear by how John said he and they didn’t know what they would be like when Jesus returned. If this was talking about covenant transition, this would be a ridiculous thing to say *since they were preaching exactly what a new covenant without an old covenant would look like*.

One of the most important examples of striving till the end might be Revelation 3. In the letters to the seven churches, some are told that if they endure to the end (i.e., if they die as martyrs in the persecution), they will be saved. But some, because of their spiritual maturity, will get to skip the whole tribulation:

“Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.” (Rev 3:10-11 ESV)

The implications of this are interesting and are more than we can discuss here. The point remains that it is not outside the scope of Paul’s teaching for him to write *“not that I have attained it”* in order to emphasize continued need to work and strive for holiness.

Third, it’s not just in Philippians 3:21 where Paul employs a plural possessive pronoun with a singular noun (“our body”). The two preceding verses (3:19-20) have four occurrences: *“whose end is destruction,” “whose god is their appetite,” “whose glory is their shame,”* and *“our citizenship is in heaven.”* Each of the Christ-deniers had their own individual destruction, their own individual appetite, and their own individual shame. Likewise, each citizen of heaven had their own individual citizenship. One might argue that there was a corporate solidarity in each of the two groups, and that is certainly true, but we can know for certain that the singular nouns were distributive because of how Paul employed a plural noun with a plural pronoun in the same sentence construction: “who set *their minds* on earthly things.” Paul had no problem switching between singular and plural nouns with plural pronouns.

A rather clear example of how Paul employed the plural possessive pronoun with a singular noun to give emphasis to the noun, yet acknowledge the obvious plurality of the noun, is 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (ESV)

In the Greek, “your” is plural, but the nouns “spirit,” “soul,” and “body” are singular. Paul didn’t mean the corporate spirit, soul, and body of the Thessalonian church; rather, he prayed that the individual spirits, souls, and bodies of the Thessalonian saints might be kept until the Parousia. CBV advocates use this text in this way to prove imminence by audience relevance, and they are right to do so. Yet, Paul uses “your (plural) body (singular)” here in Thessalonians, which is the same grammatical construct as “our body” in Romans 8:23 and Philippians 3:21.

Other examples of the plural possessive pronoun with a singular noun, referring to a plurality of the noun distributed to each individual, are Luke 6:22; Romans 8:16, 26; 2 Corinthians 1:12, 6:11; 1 Thessalonians 2:17; James 3:3; and Revelation 13:16. The James 3:3 passage is so important, it needs to be quoted: “*Now if we put the bits into the horses’ mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well*” (NASB). Here we clearly see the singular “body” meaning multiple horses’ bodies.

After looking at all the evidence regarding plural possessive pronouns with singular nouns, it is clear that the CBV claim that the phrase “our body” *must* be a corporate body is not only contrary to the rules of Greek grammar, but is also contrary to the context of the passages in view.

In our next article, we will look at 1 Corinthians 15 and the present passive indicative verb in the phrase “*are being raised*.”

Continue to Part 2 of this series:

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¹ Wallace, Daniel B. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, pp. 399-406

² Robertson, A. T. *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, pp. 403-409.

³ Blass, Friedrich & Debrunner, Albert. *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, pp. 73-76.

⁴ Turner, Nigel. *A Grammar of the New Testament Greek*, vol. 3: Syntax; p. 24.

⁵ Bruce, F.F. *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, 1977; excerpted from “Flesh and Spirit” by F.F. Bruce, <https://www.the-highway.com/articleAug03.html>

⁶ King, Max. *The Cross & the Parousia*, pp. 565-573

⁷ Ibid, p. 572

⁸ Ibid, pg. 573