

Death, Immortality, and Heaven: No. 3

We can relate to spiritual entities only by giving them some physical or material dimension perceptible through our senses, so God communicated to us in accommodative ways employing physical concepts to reveal the unseen. The tendency of many, however, has been to accept the literal, fleshly, earthly, materialistic accommodation as the real thing. Because of this, Paul's explanation of a necessary change, "*For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality*" (1 Cor. 15; 52-53) is generally thought to point to a perfecting and immortalizing of the fleshly body, but the same entity cannot be both corporal and incorporeal at the same time. One of our problems is in attaching a physical image to the use of the term "body" when it refers to the spiritual nature. The spiritual body is no more physical than is the spiritual body of Christ, the forgiven ones.

"RESURRECTION" BY HANEGRAAFF

The widely-known radio Bible talk show answer man, Hank Hanegraaff wrote a well-publicized book titled "Resurrection." In the area of apologetics, there is good material in the book, but I challenge his materialistic concept of heaven. Before I get to the main point, I will side-track to two other matters which I consider amusingly amazing.

Will there be sex after the resurrection, he asks? In answer to that question, he conjectures that, since God created sex in Eden, in the Eden restored (heaven) he will not remove it but redeem it – whatever that means. He explains that, even though there will be no marrying or giving in marriage, our risen bodies will still be male and female. Thus sexuality will still be a part of our nature so that men and women will enjoy each other, not in a mere physical sense, but in a metaphysical sense – whatever that means. After playing up the higher nature of our heavenly sexuality, however, he does state that there will be no physical sexual acts.

Even with such enjoyable spiritual sexuality, he does not reveal if the children who died before sexual maturity or the celibate person will miss out on that. Nor does he let us know if persons with same-sex attraction will have that inclination eternally. Since there will be no marrying, will that sexuality be enjoyed out side of wedlock? Will sexuality allow for temptation? If a widowed man married again and then his widowed wife married two other men, would there be a sort of sexual foursome in heaven? What of the person whose sinful spouse did not make the heavenly scene? Many persons would not want their present spouse again; would they be stuck with them eternally? I suppose we will have to wait to find the answers but, in the meantime, I suggest that you not set your physical expectations too high! I suspect that too many men look forward to eternal enjoyment of sex, food, and golf!

Will we have our pets in heaven? Hank Hanegraaff offers "scriptural basis" for his assumptions that animals have souls by explaining that God created them "living creatures" (Gen. 1:20, 24; Rev. 8:9). Also, "*Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down to the earth?*" (Ecc. 3:21). What does that prove?

He conjectures that, since Eden had animals, there is reason to believe Eden restored will have them also. He further assumes that there will be green plants and

flowers in heaven; so if God can raise grass to life again, why not cats? He (Hank, not God) definitely gives hope that one's pets may be raised! That is about as logical as saying that since the Garden of Eden was on the Euphrates River in Iraq, restored Eden (heaven) will be in Iraq.

He does not explain if all animals will be raised, or what a poodle must do to qualify for eternal life! Will they be raised on the basis of having been loved by a human? If being the pet of a faithful individual qualifies them, then we may have an abundance of "immortal spiritual" cats, dogs, parrots, mice, skunks, snakes, and horses. You may have a whole kennel of all the dogs you loved on earth! If the nice parakeet was the much-loved pet of an atheist, would that disqualify it from heaven? If a cat can be raised to immortality due to the love of a Christian woman, do you suppose she might get her unbelieving husband in by her love also? ☺ Not much evidence is required to "prove" something you want to believe!

IMMORTAL FLESHLY BODIES

Enough foolishness! Let's get to the main point. Will we have "flesh and bones" bodies in the resurrection? Hank says we will have such fleshly bodies made spiritual and immortal, and I would suppose that most believers accept that view.

He reasons like this: Jesus had a fleshly body that was crucified, buried, and raised from the dead. In his transformed, spiritual body of the resurrection he demonstrated that he was still physical in the same body of his crucifixion. He consumed food. He invited them to see and touch his body with its scars, saying, "*See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself, handle me, and see, for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have*" (Luke 24:39). Later, the disciples saw him ascend bodily into a cloud. So Jesus is in heaven in a body of flesh and bones. Because it was a spiritualized body did not mean it was not material also, he maintains. To illustrate that point, Hank states that the Bible is a material book but it is also a spiritual book at the same time. That is a poor illustration. The spiritual quality is the message which is not comparable to the spiritual nature he attributes to the risen body. The paper, ink, and leather are not spiritual. The concept of a glorified physical body like that of Jesus would lead us to believe that fleshly imperfections like his scars and nail prints would be with us eternally.

Being the slow one in the class, I seem always to miss connective logic and that gives rise to questions. In the three manifestations of divinity – whether you call them the Trinity, the Godhead, or Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – do they not all have the same nature?

"*God is spirit,*" Jesus said (John 4:24). "*He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God..*" (Col. 1:15; see 1 Tim. 1:17). "*No one has ever seen God,*" John asserts in John 1:18. Again, in his risen body Jesus told them, "*..a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see me have.*" So God, being spirit, has no flesh and bones. Since the heavenly realm is spiritual, Paul confirms, "*I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable*" (1 Cor. 15:50).

Paul tells us that, whatever Jesus' pre-incarnate state was, divested himself of it in taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men in human form (Phil. 2:5-8). The Jews wanted to kill Jesus because he called God his Father, making himself equal with God (John 5:18). As he was about to become obedient to death, he prayed, "*I glorified*

thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do; and now, Father, glorify me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made" (John 17:1-5). Jesus was to be restored to his pre-incarnate state, divested this time of his human nature in which he had manifested himself to man. Otherwise, we have a "flesh and bones" King who cannot enter his own kingdom, for "*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.*" Added to that is the popular expectation that Jesus will return to earth in a physical body to reign as king over a literal kingdom on earth. Talk about Nicodemus being confused about physical and spiritual things! Do we have one spirit God who is invisible and omnipresent and another who is "spiritual flesh and bones," visible, and limited in presence to that physical body?

Many look forward to seeing his risen body thinking that they will have similar bodies themselves, however, Jesus risen body was the same as before his death. It bore the same scars. He identified himself by his flesh and bones body. It is true that he could appear, enter a locked room, and hide his identity. But before his death he could transfigure himself, appear to the disciples in a boat walking on water, and perform all sorts of miracles but he was in his fleshly body. Such things happened to other disciples also, for when he entered the boat with them, they were transported to the other shore (John 6:16-21) and Philip was caught away after baptizing the Ethiopian (Acts 8:39-40).

"He was manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16), even as God manifested himself in a burning bush and the Holy Spirit manifested himself in tongues as of fire. The ascended Christ is no more flesh than God and the Holy Spirit are fire.

What ultimately happened to Jesus' "flesh and bones" body? Maybe you know. I don't! It is not revealed. Because it was of dust, we may suppose it returned to dust. I admit with Paul, "*Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up to glory*" (1 Tim. 3:16).

Because "*the Word BECAME flesh*" we may safely conclude that he was not fleshly before his incarnation and when he returned to his former glory he was Spirit. No scars! No prostrating ourselves before him physically!

John knew Jesus intimately both before and after his resurrection. He saw the ascension. Yet he did not know what he would be like at his return, for he wrote, "*Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be LIKE HIM, for we shall see him as he is.*" (1 John 3:2-3). Really? Will we have scarred fleshly bodies? Since the divine is invisible, seeing him evidently means to discern him as is also indicated when Jesus said, "*He who has seen me has seen the Father*" (John 14:9).

DUST FIRST, THEN HEAVENLY

With these things in mind, let us look again at Paul's words about the risen body: "*If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, so we shall also bear the image of*

the man of heaven. I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable" (1 Cor. 15:44-50). The earthly nature does not inherit the heavenly nature.

What God does with our bodies, whether returning them to the earthly elements forever or giving them an eternal earthly nature, will not be determined by our understanding, imagination, or expectation. He will take care of that!

My concern is that believers tend to be too earthly minded and materialistic in perceiving spiritual truths. God began with fleshly Adam. He formed a literal nation. He ruled them by earthly kings and priests demanding performance of physical rituals. Through that earthly nation he brought forth his Son manifested in flesh in the form of man.

All of this was to reach out to earthly man in a manner he could comprehend in order to lead him to spiritual life. Now, through the spiritual Adam, Jesus, he has revealed The Way, The Truth, and The Life. Those accommodations to our physical perceptions have fulfilled their purpose and no longer prevail. We do not look for a restored kingdom or for heaven on this earth. He has led us from the tentative and physical to the eternal and spiritual. []

(Cecil Hook: October 2005

Lagniappe: The administration of the smallest of organizations cannot escape criticism. No form of civil government can meet the approval of all. Our nation and government are so massive and complicated that no one or group can claim to understand it and administer it effectively and without determined opposition. Shakespeare hit it right with "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." Carlyle would add, "Every noble crown is, and on Earth will forever be, a crown of thorns." Then Sir Walter Scott ponders:

"Who o'er the herd would wish to reign,
Fantastic, fickle, fierce, and vain?
Vain as a leaf upon a stream,
And fickle as the changeful dream;
Fantastic as a woman's mood,
And fierce as Frenzy's fever'd blood.
Thou many-headed monster thing,
Who would wish to be thy king?"