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S6E8 - Paul on the Resurrection - Part 2

September 1, 2021



Risen Jesus - Mike Licona

We conclude our mini-series on Paul's thoughts about the resurrection in his letters. Dr Licona walks us through letters that are undisputed writings of Paul, some that are disputed, and some more words that change meaning depending on who you talk to. Tune in!

[0:00] Intro

[0:59] Philippians 3:21

[2:33] Disputed vs Undisputed Letters of Paul

[4:43] Colossians 2:9

[5:33] 2 Corinthians 5:1-3

[14:20] 1 Corinthians 15:12-27

[16:34] A Recap: Why is Paul so Important?

[20:13] Viewer Question: Strongest Argument Against the Resurrection

[24:16] Outro

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Transcript

[MUSIC PLAYING] Hello and welcome to the Risen Jesus podcast with Dr. Michael Kona. Dr. Lacona is Associate Professor in Theology at Houston Baptist University. And he is President of Risen Jesus, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

My name is Kurt Jarrus, your host. Well, today we're going to finish up our discussion on Paul and the important role that he has to play for making a case for the resurrection. And as we look at the historical bedrock about this, we're going to be looking at a few more passages from Paul on what he believed about the resurrection to be.

Mike, last episode we went through a number of passages that seem to have suggested a spiritual-- believe in a spiritual resurrection. And of course, you gave some very good reasons for thinking that Paul didn't mean an immaterial resurrection, that spiritual could be a physical resurrection as well. But there are a few more other verses in Paul's writings that clue us even more so into his belief on a physical resurrection.

Yeah, one of those texts would be Philippians chapter 3, verse 21. And here's how it reads. "He will transform Christ, will transform our humble body to be in similar form to his glorious body, according to the working of his power, even to subject all things to himself." So here, he's talking about our humble body.

He's going to transform our humble body. Well, what's that? It's our present body. He's going to transform that to be conformed to his glorious body.

Notice it says he has a body too, right? And our body is not going to be exchanged. It's not like we leave this body behind and then get a new one, exchanging one body for another. No, he's going to transform this present humble mortal body to be conformed to his glorious one.

So remember, because there are several times, just a few we've mentioned, but there's

some others I haven't mentioned, where it says, "The way Jesus was raised is the way we are going to be raised." So Paul talks about the way we are going to be raised. And so therefore, the way we're going to be raised is the way Jesus was raised. So if our resurrection involves a transformation of our present humble mortal body by implication, it means that that's what happened to Jesus at his resurrection.

And there are even other verses here going on. I think from Colossians, there's a verse there about the body, right? That's right. Now, I want to point out here, because we are talking about historical bedrock, that's what's, you know, we're putting an emphasis on every text that we've looked at so far in terms of Paul, you know, in Paul's letters have been undisputed letters of Paul.

In other words, scholars across the board, there is a heterogeneous, unanimous consensus that Paul wrote these letters, Romans, First and Second Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians. And then there's also First Thessalonians and Philemon in there. So there's seven undisputed letters of Paul.

We've only quoted from them thus far. Colossians is not one of those undisputed letters. It's authorship is disputed.

You have some like, oh, prior to the 1960s you had, I think there was one scholar that did a bean count and said the majority of scholars think that Colossians was written by Paul. And then you've got Raymond Brown in the 1990s, I believe it was, he appealed to someone who wrote, I think it was in the 70s. I've got his book on my shelf, but I don't recall what it is.

And he said the majority of scholars in this project he did, the majority of scholars do not think that Paul wrote Colossians. But then later on, at least a decade later, you have been Witherington who writes a commentary on Colossians saying the majority of critical scholars today do think that Paul wrote Colossians. Well, in any sense, I think we can say that it is a disputed letter of Paul.

And probably, let's just be safe and say maybe half of the scholars today think Paul wrote it, the other half do not think. So whatever the majority opinion is on Colossians, it's not a substantial one. It's just a bare majority.

But it is a disputed letter Paul. In Colossians chapter two, verse nine, Paul says, "For in Christ, in him dwells all the fullness, all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form." So he's talking about in him, in bodily form, dwells all the fullness of deity. And the term there for dwells is in the present tense.

So Jesus has a body of some sort now. Now does that mean, you know, he talks about spiritual body elsewhere, if my interpretation and the interpretation of many others is mistaken, and that spiritual means immaterial, you could have an immaterial-ethereal

body. So that may not necessarily refer to a physical body.

It's just ambiguous there. And then finally, you've got a very difficult text. And that's second Corinthians chapter five, verses one through three.

Let me read that text to you. For we know that if our earthly house of dwelling is destroyed, that is our present body, and in the context, Paul talks about his present body wearing out, and from all the time on the road, and the persecution, stonings, and beatings, et cetera. We know that if our earthly house of dwelling is destroyed, our present body, we have a building from God, a house made without hands eternal in the heavens.

For even in this, even in this we groan, longing to be further clothed by our heavenly dwelling. If indeed, even having taken it off, we will not be found naked. He said, what is that talking about there? It's a very difficult text in there is by no means any kind of consensus among scholars on what this first means.

If you read the commentaries, the academic commentaries on this, there are a wide variety of opinions on how to interpret this text. What makes it difficult, really difficult, is there is a textual discrepancy, and it's the word, ech-du-saminoy, ech-du-saminoy, which means to take it off. And there is a textual variant, end-du-saminoy, which means to put it on.

And the difference in the Greek word is one letter. It's a difference between a kappa, like a k, and a nu, which is an n in English. And you can understand how an ancient manuscript, a k in an n, if there's just a little smudge, or it's wearing out a little bit, the ink became a little bit light, or maybe the penmanship just made it difficult to read.

It's, this is difficult, but that one little letter and the difference in the word makes a big difference on how to interpret this text. And the reason it's important is because if it means to take it off, if it's ech-du-saminoy, ech-du-saminoy, and Paul's saying to take it off, then he is speaking of an exchange of our bodies. He is in essence saying we long to be clothed with our heavenly clothing, our heavenly body, because when we take off our present body, if we get our heavenly body, we won't be found naked.

In other words, there's gonna be an exchange. We're going to, when we die, we will exchange our earthly body, we will get rid of our corpse, and we will take on our resurrection body. Which is in heaven.

We don't have to wait for the general resurrection for it. We get it immediately upon death. And if this is the case, the problem that creates is Paul, in 1 Corinthians, talks about our getting, our resurrection body, resurrection occurring at Jesus' second coming.

1 Corinthians 15, 23, each in its own order, Christ the first fruits, after that, those who belong to Christ at his coming. So this would mean that Paul changed his mind between

writing 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians on the nature of resurrection. 2 Corinthians still probably being written before any of the gospel.

So it'd be like the gospels take Paul's view in 1 Corinthians, and it's our Philipians, some of these others, but Paul changed his mind by the time he's writing 2 Corinthians. But which word is correct? Actusominoi or endusominoi, take it off or put it on? Well, the majority of English translations opt for the word endusominoi, to put it on, and for good reasons. For one, Paul uses the term when he says we long to be further clothed.

He uses the term, ependuamy, which means to be further clothed. Paul's talking about not taking something off in that sense. He's talking about putting something else on.

So it's not like taking off our shirt. It's like putting a jacket over our shirt. He's being further clothed.

So that fits more with the endusominoi rather than the ectusominoi. Moreover, the ectusominoi, to put it on, has superior readings in the manuscripts. Our better manuscripts and more manuscripts have the other reading of endusominoi, to put it on.

The reason ectusominoi is in our critical Greek text, at least the Nestle Alon one and the United Bible Society one, which uses the same Greek text, is because the translation committee of the Nestle Alon, years ago, opted for ectusominoi with Bruce Metzger objecting. And he said that endusominoi should be used to put it on, because it has superior textual, superior textual attestation for it. But the committee opted for ectusominoi.

And, but most scholars today, most of the scholars who are involved in translations, and even in most commentaries, they opt for the endusominoi, put it on, and indeed that fits more with what Paul's saying. So I think what Paul is saying is, we long to be further clothed, we don't wanna be naked. In other words, a disembodied spirit.

We long to be further clothed with a resurrection body. And this will happen at the resurrection. When we put it on, of course, we won't be found naked.

We would be if there was no general resurrection. We would shed our bodies upon death, but that's not what's going to happen. We may become disembodied spirits upon death to be absent from the bodies to be present with the Lord, but after that becomes the general resurrection, when our corpses will be raised, transformed, and then further clothed with the resurrection body, and then that works with 1 Corinthians 15 as well, where our mortal bodies will be swallowed up in victory.

So I don't see any changing here on Paul's part, and even if there was a change, it would require still another change because by the time Romans is written after 2 Corinthians, Paul changes back to physical bodily resurrection. The spirit who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies in the redemption of our body. So it makes

more sense here to look at 2 Corinthians to be in alignment with what Paul said in 1 Corinthians and what he says afterward in Philippians and in Romans.

- Yeah, intriguing debate there over the textual variant and the implications. So thanks for pointing that out to us and for going through a few more of the passages that Paul writes on-- - I wanna say one more thing about that too. - Sure.

- That'll let you say that. - You'll hear some folks say at times that when we're talking about the textual integrity of our Greek New Testament, we can get back to a text that's quite pure and that none of the alternate readings change any doctrine. Well, we see that that is false.

They do change. There's an alternate reading, a plausible, a viable one that does change the meaning, but I think Dan Wallace states it better when he says it doesn't change any gospel doctrine, any essential doctrine. - Yeah, it seems like even if it's alleged to be the case that Paul changed his mind here, there's still enough evidence that elsewhere, there's this Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, a physical resurrection of the dead.

So yeah, this one does sort of cause some concern though as we look into it. And we've gone through a number of passages here about Paul and one passage that I don't think we brought up comes from 1 Corinthians 15, verses 12 through, or maybe 27 or so. I know you've mentioned 22, but I've pulled up here verse 12 from 1 Corinthians 15.

Now, if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? This passage here, you can't help but read it and come away with thinking Paul is talking about a physically raised person. He's not talking about a spiritually raised person. Some of this language that he's using doesn't even make sense if it's a merely spiritually raised person.

Why would people object to a spiritual being a person being spiritually raised? No, in fact, he's talking about the physically resurrected Christ and the implications therein for the forgiveness of sins. And he goes more into the theology there than maybe you as a historian Mike would go into. But I think here this is another passage where Paul's talking about the physical resurrection and the spiritual or existential view doesn't really make sense.

So, well, I think that would be true if he's referring to it elsewhere, but I don't see that as being clear at all or required. Yeah. Yeah, I take it just as sort of an awkward reading if you're taking it as the spiritual view.

It doesn't make as much sense. But maybe I'm-- Again, you interpret these ambiguous, these vague texts. You interpret them in the life of the clearer ones.

And we do have some fairly clear ones, like Romans 8, 11, and 23, Philippians 3, 21. And

then you've got the first Corinthians 15, 3, and 4, which is, I think, weekly implied. So through these, I think we do have Paul, the weight of evidence at least would, I think, pretty weightily tip in favor of Paul thinking of resurrection in terms of bodily physical term, material terms.

Yeah. Okay, so we've gone through a lot of passages here. Why don't we sort of recap on Paul? How do we survey all the verses we've gone through? And also then, if you could answer, why is Paul so important to historians when we're thinking about the resurrection of Jesus? Yeah, so just, let's see, summarize what we've said and he's covered in these last three episodes is Paul is really important because he is perhaps our earliest author and we can get to his views through what scholars refer to as the undisputed letters of Paul, that is, they, through letters that are undisputedly written by Paul.

He says certain things we can glean from those letters to learn. And we know that Paul had a relationship with Jesus' apostles, those who had walked with Jesus, the leaders of the church, at least Peter, James, and John, he'd been with them. He's preaching the same gospel message they were preaching and that gospel message involved the death, burial, resurrection and appearances.

Those appearances happen to individuals, to groups, to friend and foe alike. He knew the eyewitnesses, we can get back to those eyewitnesses through Paul and that oral tradition embedded in his undisputed letters. So what did he mean by resurrection? We can see that there were a number of texts in Paul's letters where he talks about, either talks about or potentially talks about an appearance of Jesus to him, but they are vague or ambiguous, too much so in order to get any firm conclusions out of.

There are others when Paul talks about the way Christ was raised, the way we will be raised. So when he comes at it from a backward way, we can get it coming backwards by saying, okay, if he thinks that we're gonna be raised the way Jesus was raised, let's look, Paul doesn't talk about the way Jesus was raised, but he does talk about the way we are going to be raised. So if we look at the nature of how we're gonna be raised at the general resurrection, then by implication, we can see how Paul and the Jerusalem apostles regarded the resurrection of Jesus, the nature of Jesus' resurrection.

And although there are number of ambiguous, vague texts about the appearance and what our resurrection is gonna be like, there are number of texts that do strongly imply that it's going to be physical material. Our corpses are going to be raised and transformed. We see this in Romans 8, 11 and 23, Philippians 3, 21, and then weekly implied in 1 Corinthians 15, three and four, I believe it is.

Yeah. - Oh, thanks for that recap. I know loads of verses, lots to sift through.

And, you know, part of the reason why there's debate is because there are so many

verses and some people have interpreted certain passages to be just a merely spiritual immaterial resurrection. So it's caused for some division on interpretation. But of course, you provide a great reasons for us to think that even those passages are either ambiguous at best or better yet understood from clearer verses that the spiritual resurrection is still a physical one.

There's nothing, you know, necessarily mutually exclusive about those concepts, the spiritual and the physical. Good. All right.

Well, why don't we finish the episode here by taking a question from one of the listeners here. This question comes from Doug and he says, I'd like to know what you think the strongest argument against the resurrection is and how you deal with it. - That's a good question from Doug.

I don't really think that there are any strong arguments against the resurrection. I really don't. But one that comes to my mind that would be one, I think if my confidence in the resurrection were weak and I'd probably take this.

And that I've never heard someone give it, but it's something that I wonder about myself. Okay. So we've got certain evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.

We're talking about it this season, some of the evidence, the historical bedrock. So, the evidence we have a certain quantity and quality of that evidence. Well, let's just suppose that we did not have that.

We didn't have any evidence really against the resurrection of Jesus. It's just something that would have to be accepted entirely on faith. Okay.

So we didn't have any. You just got the Bible in one source. Let's just say one gospel.

All we had was one gospel. And that gospel says about the resurrection of Jesus. We don't have the letters of Paul.

All we have is one gospel. Let's call it the gospel Matthew. Pick whichever one you want.

And it talks about the resurrection of Jesus. That's all we have. All right.

So something we can't verify historically is just by faith. Now, let's just say that we're gonna assign, we're gonna call the quality and quantity of evidence we have for the resurrection. We'll just call it X, okay? Well, whatever the strength is, you wanna assign that.

It's just X. Now, let's say that the evidence for Islam, that Islam is true is X. It's the same amount that we have for the resurrection. I don't think Islam has anything even close to that. But let's just say that that's what it was.

All right. The evidence for the Quran being divinely inspired is X. Would that be enough evidence to persuade me to become a Muslim? And I don't know the answer to that question. I haven't really taken the time to think through that, but.

- So your point then is if in this hypothetical scenario where some of the evidence shifts or shifts to be smaller, right, the quality and the quantity of it, if you had an equivalent religion, why wouldn't you just become a member of that other religion? Is that right? - That's right. If I didn't have it for Christianity, but it was there for another religion, would it be enough to persuade me to convert to that religion? And I don't know. So that makes me empathetic or feel more patiently or more compassion.

- To our other religions? - To our other religions on the skeptic or the person of other religions who when they hear the evidence for the resurrection, it's not enough to persuade them. So that's what I think. I would say at least for me, I would assess as the strongest argument.

It's not really an argument against the resurrection because we have the evidence for, you know, the X, whatever we want to say. We have X. Is it enough to persuade? - Yeah, well call it the problem of religious diversity. - There you go.

- Yeah, that's your answer to the strongest argument against Christianity, we'll say. In your hypothetical scenario. Good.

All right, thanks Mike for answering that question and for leading us through those final passages on Paul and his belief about the resurrection. I look forward to continuing on our discussion looking at other facts from the historical bedrock. In our next episode.

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(dramatic music)