

# The Change of the Living

By Ed Stevens for *Fulfilled Magazine* - Spring 2014 (Vol 9 - Issue 1)

Of the various resurrection texts in Scripture, there are four which many of us find “difficult” to understand: 1 Corinthians 15:51-54; 2 Corinthians 5:1-4; Philippians 3:21; and 1 John 3:2. Most commentaries say these Scriptures describe *some kind of change* that occurred to *living saints* at the Parousia. But what was this *change*? According to these four biblical texts, this change or transformation into “being like Him” had the **following four characteristics**: (1) it was a **bodily change**; (2) it was **for living saints only** (not for dead saints); (3) it was **for individual saints only** (not for a collective body); and (4) it **occurred only at the Parousia**, not before or afterwards. Let’s examine the Scriptural support for these four characteristics. Note especially the words boldfaced and added in brackets in the biblical text quotes:

## Bodily Change

- “. . . *the dead will be raised incorruptible . . . we shall be changed*” (1 Cor 15:52-54 NKJV). Paul wrote that the dead saints were to be “raised incorruptible,” meaning that they “put on” their new incorruptible bodies when they were raised out of Hades at the Parousia. The living saints (Paul’s *we*) “put on” incorruption and immortality at that same time, which *changed* their corruptible mortal bodies into incorruptible immortal bodies. Thus, both the resurrected dead and the changed living saints had their new immortal bodies after the resurrection/change event. This was a **bodily change**.
- “. . . *not that we want to put off the body (the clothing of the spirit), but rather that we would be further clothed [or clothed over]*” (2 Cor 5:4 Amplified). Note the boldfaced words *further clothed* (Gk *epi-enduo*). The commentaries say this word means putting on new garments *over the top of* the old, without taking the old ones off first. Immortality was put on *over the top of* their individual mortal bodies, so that their mortality was “swallowed up” (or *changed*) into immortality. Their old mortal bodies were *changed* into new immortal bodies. **This was an individual bodily change, not merely a spiritual or covenantal status change of a collective body.**
- “. . . *who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body*” (Phil 3:21 NKJV). Since “His glorious body” refers to Jesus’ individual body, it implies that “our lowly body” refers to the individual bodies of saints as well. This was clearly an individual *bodily* change, not merely a spiritual or covenantal status change of a collective body. There is a free PDF article available, titled “**our body**,” which provides detailed grammatical analysis of this verse in its context to show that Paul is talking about **individual bodies being changed**. Simply request it by email and we will send it as an attachment (preterist1@preterist.org).
- “. . . *it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.*” (1 John 3:2 NASB95). Here John implies the change to be *bodily* when he writes “what we will be,” “we will be like Him,” and “see Him just as He is.” That is *body* language, and harmonizes perfectly with the *body* language in the three previous texts. They would see Christ’s individual body, and **have their individual bodies changed to “be like” His glorious immortal body.**

## Living Saints Only

- “. . . *we shall not all sleep . . . the dead will be raised . . . we shall be changed*” (1 Cor 15:51-52 NKJV). The “we” here refers only to those saints who would remain alive at the time of the Parousia. We know this because of Paul’s contrast between the disembodied dead who would be *raised*, versus *the living “we” who would have their bodies changed*.
- “. . . *while we are still in this tent [our physical bodies], we groan . . . not that we want to put off the body (the clothing of the spirit), but rather that we would be further clothed [or clothed over]*” (2 Cor 5:4 Amplified). This builds upon what Paul had said in his first epistle (see above), and clarifies it further. Those saints who were “still in this tent” (their individual physical bodies) at the Parousia would not have to “put off” their bodies (die), but would instead be “further clothed” or clothed upon with immortality (or life), so that their individual *mortal* bodies were changed into individual *immortal* bodies. The dead were disembodied, so they had no bodies to be changed. So the dead were raised out of Hades and “put on” their new immortal bodies. But the living saints still had their mortal bodies, which required a change before they could go to heaven to be with Christ at the Parousia. *So it was only those living saints who had immortality “clothed over” their existing individual mortal bodies.*
- “. . . *we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body*” (Phil 3:20-21 NKJV). The bodily transformation happened to those who were eagerly waiting (while still alive) until the return of Christ. The dead, unlike the living, had no bodies to be transformed. Therefore, this bodily transformation happened to living saints only.
- “. . . *when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is*” (1 John 3:2 NASB95). Note the boldfaced words. When Christ appeared at His Parousia (1 John 2:28), those living saints saw Christ in His glorious individual body, and their individual bodies were changed to “be like” His glorious body. This bodily change occurred to *living saints* only.

## Individual Bodies Only – Not a Collective Body

- “. . . *Beloved, now we [each] are children of God, . . . what we [each] will be . . . when He appears, we [each] will be like Him, because we [each] will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*” (1 John 3:2-3 NASB95). Here in verse two are four more references to “we.” Each of the “we” was a child of God, who would each see Christ at His parousia and be changed to “be like Him.” If it was talking about a collective body, it would say that the “we” were one singular “child of God,” not a bunch of individual “children of God.” Furthermore, a look at the next verse (1 John 3:3) clearly shows that John has individual saints in mind when he refers to them as “everyone” and “himself.” Each of those individual saints, *everyone* of them remaining alive at the time of the Parousia, had “this hope” of seeing Christ and being changed to “be like Him.” And that hope motivated *everyone* of those individual saints to purify *himself*. John was not talking about a collective hope causing a collective body to purify itself.
- “. . . *we [living saints] shall not all sleep [die], but we [who remain alive at the Parousia] shall all be changed . . . the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we [living saints] shall be changed*” (1 Cor 15:51-52 NKJV). This is talking about individual *dead* saints who were *raised* out of Hades, and individual *living* saints who were *changed*—not about a collective

body of saints being raised and changed. There is a contrast here between “the dead” being raised versus “we” (the living saints) being changed. Which one of those two groups of saints is the collective body? Obviously neither! Instead it is simply talking about individual dead saints being *raised* and individual living saints being *changed*. The three references to “we” (1 Cor 15:51-52) are talking about the living saints who remained alive until the Parousia. Each of those “we” who remained alive until the Parousia had their individual bodies “changed” from mortal to immortal without having to experience physical death. The dead saints were “raised incorruptible” out of Hades, while the living saints had their mortal bodies “changed” to immortal bodies by “putting on” incorruption and immortality at the Parousia.

- “. . . For **we [each]** know . . . **we [each]** have . . . **we [each]** sigh and groan inwardly . . . **we [each]** yearn to be clothed over . . . that **we [each]** may not be found naked . . . while **we [each]** are still in this tent, **we [each]** groan . . . not that **we [each]** want to put off [be unclothed] . . . but rather that **we [each]** would be further clothed [or clothed over], so that what is mortal . . . may be swallowed up by life . . .” (2 Cor 5:1-4 *Amplified*). Here are more references to “we” (i.e., the saints who remained alive until the Parousia). Each of those individuals in the “we” group *knew* something, *had* something, *sighed* and *groaned*, and would be found at the Parousia either “naked” (dead and disembodied) or still alive in their physical bodies. This is not referring to a collective body being “further clothed.” Instead, Paul is saying that those individual saints, who were “found” still alive at the Parousia (i.e., still in their individual “tents”), would have their bodies changed without having to experience physical death (“putting off their bodies”). They would have immortality “clothed over” them without taking off their mortal bodies first. That immortality (“life”) *swallowed up* or changed their mortal bodies into immortal bodies. The *NIGTC* commentary explains it this way: “For indeed, as tent-dwellers, we sigh with a sense of oppression because, not wishing to become disembodied, we desire to put on our heavenly dwelling as an overgarment.” Do you catch the power of that? Some have wondered why Paul says “this tent” (singular) instead of “these tents” (plural) if he is, in fact, talking about individual physical bodies, and not a singular collective body. Perhaps the *Jamieson Fausset and Brown* commentary (on 1 Cor 15:53-54) explained it best when they said that the demonstrative pronoun “this” in reference to “tent” was like Paul pointing with his finger “to his own body and that of those whom he addresses.”
- “. . . For **[each of] our citizenship[s]** is in heaven, from which **we [each]** also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform **[each of] our lowly bod[ies]** that it may be conformed to His glorious body . . . ” (Phil 3:20-21 NKJV). Note the references to “we” and “our.” Each of the individual saints had a citizenship in heaven, was eagerly waiting for Christ’s return, and had a “lowly body” that would be transformed to be like Christ’s “glorious body”. Since the word “body” here is singular, the Collective Body View claims that this proves it can only be talking about a transformation (or change) of a singular collective *body*, not of a whole bunch of individual *bodies* (plural). That sounds like a good argument at first, but it ignores what Paul had just said to those saints in the preceding context. For instance, Paul explains his own personal attitude about constantly striving for perfection (*Phil 3:12-14*), and urges each of the individual “brethren” there at Philippi to “have the same attitude” and “keep on living by that same standard” and “follow his example” and “walk according to the pattern” which the apostles were exhibiting (*Phil 3:15-17*). Then he warns them about those who were walking as “enemies of the cross of Christ” who would

end up being destroyed because they had “set their minds on earthly things” (*Phil 3:18-19*). In contrast to that “earthly” mindset of the “enemies,” Paul posits “our heavenly citizenship” (*Phil 3:20*). The “our” (“we” or “us”) in the context is referring to both the Philippian “brethren” and the apostles (*Phil 3:13-17*). Just as each of those individual “enemies” had “set their minds” (plural) on earthly things, so also each of those individual saints should set their minds on their own individual heavenly citizenship. Do you see the contrast here? Therefore, it was not a collective body that had one singular citizenship, but individual saints each of whom had a citizenship in heaven. Now compare this phrase “*our citizenship*” in verse 20 with “*our lowly body*” in verse 21. See the similar usage of a plural “our” with a singular noun? If each of the “our” saints in verse 20 had their own individual “citizenship”, why couldn’t each of the “our” saints in verse 21 have their own individual “body”? This grammatical construction of a plural possessive pronoun (“our”) with a singular noun (“citizenship” or “body”) is a common idiomatic expression in both Greek and English, and there are many examples of it in the New Testament where it is clear in the context that it is referring to each of the individuals in the plural group having their own copy of that singular item. I have a thirteen-page PDF article, entitled “**our body**”, which thoroughly deals with this grammatical issue. To get it, simply email me and request it by title, and I will send it as an attachment ([preterist1@preterist.org](mailto:preterist1@preterist.org)).

### At the Parousia—Not Before or After

- “. . . *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet . . .*” (1 Cor 15:52 NKJV). This change would occur at the last trumpet, which was at the Parousia (cf. 1 Cor 15:23; Matt 24:31; John 5:25; 1 Thess 4:16; Heb 12:19; Rev 10:7; 11:15). This was a brief, momentary event *at the Parousia*, not a long drawn-out process beforehand or afterward.
- “. . . *we yearn to be clothed over [put on over]. . . with our heavenly dwelling [celestial body], so that by putting it on we may not be found naked (without a body) . . . but rather that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal (our dying body) may be swallowed up by life*” (2 Cor 5:2-4 Amplified). Commentaries note that the clause “*we may not be found naked*” seems to be referring to the bodily state in which those living saints would be **found at the Parousia**, when they would all stand in Christ’s presence (2 Cor 4:14). Paul states that the living saints yearned to remain alive **until the Parousia** when immortality (or *life*) would be “put on over” them, so that their old mortal bodies were swallowed up (or changed) into new immortal bodies, without having to experience physical death of their old bodies first. Do you catch the power of that?
- “*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body . . .*” (*Phil 3:20-21* NKJV). Notice that this transformation was to take place at the **return of Christ** from heaven, which Paul said was “at hand” just five verses later (*Phil 4:5*). The transformation was not an already ongoing process for a collective body, but rather a future event for individual saints **at the Parousia**.
- “. . . **when He appears**, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame **at His Parousia**. . . . **when He appears**, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is” (1 John 2:28; 3:2 NASB95). There is no ambiguity here regarding *when* this change to “be like Him” would occur. It would happen “*when He appears . . . at His parousia*,” not beforehand or afterward.

## Conclusion

In these four texts we did not find the idea of a collective body change, nor the idea of a spiritual-only or covenantal-only change of individual souls. Instead, we have seen that the change was: (1) a *bodily* change; (2) for the *living saints only*; (3) for *individual* saints only; and (4) occurred only *at the Parousia*. Since all four of these texts contain all four of these characteristics, the conclusion seems inescapable: The change spoken of in these four texts was an *individual bodily change* from mortal to immortal (without experiencing physical death), which occurred only to those saints who *remained alive* at the time of *the Parousia*.

If you would like to know more about this *change* of the living saints at the Parousia, there are some free PDF articles available which deal with it in much more detail. Simply email me and ask for the PDFs on “The Change of the Living” ([preterist1@preterist.org](mailto:preterist1@preterist.org)). Also, my book *Expectations Demand a First-Century Rapture* deals with it, and is available for order from our website at [www.preterist.org](http://www.preterist.org).