

Frequently Asked Questions about the Gospel

Answers by Tim Brassell and Jonathan Stepp

Isn't what you're teaching heresy and/or universalism?

Let's define our terms to begin the answer to this question.

First of all, what is it that we're teaching? Here's a brief summary of key facts that we believe are true about the gospel:

1. There is one God who exists in a perfect union of relationship as three distinct persons: Father, Son and Spirit. (Deut. 6:4; John 1:1; John 14:11; 14:26)

2. God decided to share this relational life of perfect joy and love by adopting humanity into his life as his children. (Eph. 1:4-5)

3. To accomplish this the Son became incarnate, he became a human being so that we might become part of the life of the Father, Son and Spirit. In this way he shares with us the love, acceptance, and eternal life he has with his Father and the Spirit. (John 1:14; 14:20; Eph. 1:5; 2 Peter 1:4; Rom. 8:15-17)

4. Humanity, together with the whole universe, was created *in and through* the Son so that this adoption could take place. Everything that exists in creation, including all people, exists because it is in relationship with the Son of God. (John 1:3-4; Acts 17:28; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:2-3)

5. Just as the Father, Son and Spirit are each distinctly themselves while existing in inseparable communion with each other, so each of us is distinctly ourselves while existing in inseparable communion with the Father and Spirit *in and through* the Son. Through our first parents, Adam and Eve, we used our distinction to sin and to damage the creation. Our sin means that the Son's incarnation is a crucifixory experience because he becomes incarnate in sinful human flesh that must be put to death in order to accomplish our adoption. (Rom. 5:18; 2 Cor. 5:21; Col. 2:11)

6. Because of our inseparable communion with the Son, whatever happens to the Son, and wherever he goes, all humanity must share in his experience. When he is born, we are born again. When he lives a perfect life he shares that perfection with us. When he dies, we die. When he is resurrected, we are resurrected. And when he ascends to the right hand of the Father in heaven we ascend in and with and through him. This means the death of our sinful, human nature and our resurrection to eternal life in Christ. (John 3:7-8; Rom. 5:18; 6:10; 2 Cor. 5:14; Eph. 2:6)

7. Since Jesus is the Word of God in the flesh, and the one in whom and through whom all things exist, we must define everything about human existence in light of who he is. Therefore, for example, hell must be defined not as separation from God but as the misery that comes from fighting our adoption and inclusion in God's life. Since all are in Christ and reconciled by him, those in hell are there because they believe a lie about themselves. They believe they are not the Father's children when in fact, in Christ, they are. (Col. 1:20; Luke 15:25-32)

Now, let's define the word "heresy." Of course, anyone can call anyone else a heretic just for disagreeing with them. But in Christianity the word actually has a fairly well accepted common definition.

Heresy is any belief that contradicts the commonly held basic doctrines of the faith as understood by the big three branches of Christianity: Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox.

These commonly held basic doctrines can be seen in the creeds created by what are known by us Protestants as the Seven Ecumenical Councils (for example, the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D.) These Councils took place before Christianity branched into major divisions and were well attended by bishops and pastors from throughout the Christian world at the time. Throughout the centuries Christians of all varieties have accepted that basic, biblical statements of the faith were produced by the Holy Spirit's guidance of these early Christians.

Among the basic doctrines they defined as orthodox (and therefore not heretical) are the doctrines of the Trinity, of Jesus' existence as fully God and fully human, of Jesus' identity as the Savior, and of the church as the people of God in the world.

Nothing in what we are teaching contradicts these basic, agreed upon statements of faith.

For example, we believe that the atoning work of Christ includes all humanity. So do most Christian churches. Most Christian churches teach as their official doctrine that Jesus died for the whole world. Some, mainly Calvinist, do not. They teach that Christ died only for some and not for others.

Neither of these positions can be branded as "heretical" because the basic doctrines agreed upon by the Christian world (and expressed by the Ecumenical Councils) do not address these points specifically. They are within the realm of beliefs on which Christians can disagree and still be within the bounds of orthodox Christian teaching.

So, is our teaching universalism? There are at least two ideas that go under the name of universalism:

One is the idea that all religions are equally valid paths to God. We are obviously not saying that since our entire emphasis is on all things in Christ and in Christ alone. If all things are reconciled in Christ then nothing is reconciled in Buddha, Mohammed, or anyone else.

The second is the idea that all people will eventually believe they are saved in Christ, stop refusing the Father's love, and enter into eternal glory. We don't believe the bible gives us enough evidence to say that this will happen. We hope for it, just as the Father does (1 Tim. 2:4,) but we don't know. It may be that some people will use their distinction and free will to disbelieve their salvation forever.

But even if we did teach universalism it would still not be heresy! The Ecumenical Councils do not forbid universalism and a number of prominent and respected Christians throughout the centuries have been universalists.

Among them was St. Gregory of Nyssa who lived in the 4th Cen. A.D. He is one of the most prominent and respected Church Fathers in all of history, especially in the Eastern Orthodox church. Gregory believed that hell is purgative, not punitive. He believed that after people had their sins and faithlessness purged away in hell they would enter heaven and that eventually this transformation would take place for all people.

We don't (fully) agree with him and neither have most Christians throughout history, but just because we don't agree with him doesn't make him a heretic.

Based on our own experience we think the real reason that *The Adopted Life's* teaching seems so alien (and almost heretical) to many of our readers is that we 21st Cen. American Christians are woefully ignorant about the history of Christian belief.

Take, for example, our teaching that all people exist in and through the Son of God and therefore all are included in his death, resurrection, and ascension. St. Irenaeus, St. Athanasius, and St. Gregory, among countless others, all taught the same doctrine (and we have quoted them in various issues of *The Adopted Life*.) It is well supported in scripture (and we reference those scriptures.)

Yet it seems alien to many of our readers because they have been trained to think in terms of Greek dualism, not the biblical and historically supported thinking of the church. Dualism says that the spiritual realm, including God, must remain separate from the physical realm, including humanity, because the physical is sinful and impure. Yet the gospel is the exact opposite message! It says that God the Son has become sin so that we might become righteous (2 Cor. 5:21.)

What we teach may seem strange to you, and you may ultimately choose to disagree with some or all of what we say, but we are not heretics.

If all are saved in Christ why does Jesus say that only a few find the narrow way?

When we interpret any scripture, including the scripture of the gospels, we have to do so in the light of who Jesus is. He is the Word of God, therefore the bible, as the word of God, must conform to who he is. If we come up with an interpretation of a scripture that violates who the Word of God is in the flesh, as Jesus, then we have the wrong interpretation.

So, who is Jesus? He is the one in whom all humanity lives and moves and has its being (Acts 17:28.) He is the one in whom everyone has been made right with God and given eternal life (Rom. 5:18.) He is the one in whom the whole world has been reconciled to the Father (Col. 1:19-20.)

These scriptures (and many others) describe who Jesus is in his fundamental identity as the union between God and humanity. Therefore, whatever Jesus means when he speaks of the "narrow way" he cannot be contradicting the reality of who he is as the one in whom all humanity exists (Heb. 1:2-3) and the one in whom all people (both Jews and Gentiles) have been made one new humanity (Eph. 2:14-16.)

So when he says that few find the narrow way he says this because it is true! Jesus himself is the narrow way and so few REALLY do trust and believe that all of creation is bound up in his life. Many "believers" believe that only a few are saved in Him, and unbelievers obviously don't believe it by definition. That leaves relatively few, in comparison, who trust this "narrow way."

If peace is made with all men through Christ, why is God's wrath a central feature of the last days?

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These scriptures (and many others) describe who Jesus is in his fundamental identity as the union between God and humanity. Therefore, whatever we understand God's wrath to be we cannot define it in a way that contradicts the reality of who Jesus is as the one in whom all humanity exists (Heb. 1:2-3) and the one in whom all people (both Jews and Gentiles) have been made one new humanity (Eph. 2:14-16.)

Seen in this light, of who Jesus is, this seeming contradiction between God's salvation and wrath is not as hard to understand or as contradictory as it sounds. Because God's wrath was aimed at the sin that was in us, and was passionately undone in the life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, sin remains as dead as the day Jesus killed it!

The question is: "What sin is God's wrath against?" Sin, in the Light of Jesus Christ, is better defined as not seeing God for Who God really is! (John 15:24; 16:8-9) Adam and Eve did not trust or see God for Who He Really was – Good – only then did they transgress and commit other sins.

The same is true for us. Now that Jesus has come and undone all of the trouble and sin in His own human life, it is in the Father's wrath (orge = passion) that we see and know the Truth for what it is!

The key to understanding here is to know that God's wrath is not different from God's love, but another aspect of it. Why do we see God's wrath as negative??? We tend to see it this way because we have largely seen the wrath of corrupt and sinful creatures and are projecting that type of wrath upon God.

It is more helpful and appropriate to think of God's wrath more like the doctor who is passionate about getting rid of cancer in a person's body. The patient is "knocked out" in kind and merciful ways so that the real problem, cancer, can be completely knocked out and the body restored to health. The doctor's wrath is against the cancer, NOT the patient!

In very passionate and exciting tones the doctor would announce to the patient "Repent and believe the Good News! You no longer have any cancer. We got it all!"

But can you also imagine the passion the doctor would have to set the record straight if the patient got up from surgery and refused to believe they had surgery, and also began to slander the physician in public? The wrath of a good doctor would be stirred up to make sure the patient and public understood the truth!

A truly good doctor would not then try to kill the patient they saved from cancer because of the slander, would they? But they would PASSIONATELY pursue a course of making the truth known and reveal the lie. This might even involve some loving action to stop the mouth of the slanderer, so that others might not hear and believe the lie and suffer unnecessarily.

Although I understand that the reality is that all are now in Christ because he upholds all things and his redemption is for all time and all people. But there may be those who refuse to accept Christ's reality for them, even at the white throne judgment. If we are all already adopted, sanctified, justified & forgiven through the

life, death, resurrection & ascension of Jesus, what is the final outcome for one who refuses to accept this reality?

Whenever we attempt to define human reality, whether in the here and now or in the final outcome of eternity, we have to do so in the light of who Jesus is. He is the Word of God, therefore our words and thoughts must conform to who he is. If we come up with an explanation of human destiny that violates who the Word of God is in the flesh, as Jesus, then we have the wrong idea.

So, who is Jesus? You have properly stated that the Reality is the inclusion of all in Christ. (Col. 1:16-20) He is the one in whom all humanity lives and moves and has its being (Acts 17:28.) He is the one in whom everyone has been made right with God and given eternal life (Rom. 5:18.) He is the one in whom the whole world has been reconciled to the Father (Col. 1:19-20.)

These scriptures (and many others) describe who Jesus is in his fundamental identity as the union between God and humanity. Therefore, however we define the final outcome for those who refuse the reality of their adoption we cannot define it in a way that contradicts the reality of who Jesus is as the one in whom all humanity exists (Heb. 1:2-3) and the one in whom all people (both Jews and Gentiles) have been made one new humanity (Eph. 2:14-16.)

In this light, it is important to hold together as one piece the thoughts noted in this question.

Fundamentally this means that the final outcome IS and always will be that Reality of our inclusion in God, in Jesus. There is no other Reality! Anything opposite of this could only be a lie! BUT, because that is the only Reality (and we are distinct with an ability to reject it), to oppose and violate the reality could only cause the most profound kind of pain! This pain, though, could ONLY be possible because the person is included, NOT because they aren't included.

For example, if a person twisted my leg too far in the wrong direction, I would begin to scream in pain. However, I would only scream because my leg is in such union with my body that it hurts like hell when that union is twisted and not experienced properly. This analogy can help us understand the outcome of any who would persist in violating or rejecting their union. (Luke 15:25-32)

Please notice that I did not say it would be their final outcome! Hell and pain can play a redemptive part in our lives. When a limb on my body is twisted such that it makes me scream in pain, that pain is also causing me to seek relief and get things back in order! I wasn't made to live with pain and like it! Pain drives me to seek relief!

Though I do NOT want to say definitively that everyone will eventually stop howling in pain and totally embrace God, I do want to say that we do not know that everyone will not eventually embrace God either! After all, if we are forever distinct (and we are), then could we not, in that distinction, seek relief anytime we are totally sick of the pain and want liberation?

We must leave room in our thinking for the possibility of God winning every part of creation over to His embrace! All we will have forever is time! We will always be alive and unable to get out of our union with God in Jesus Christ! Dare we hope that all men BE saved and come to the knowledge of the Truth??? We should dare, if we are believers! (1 Tim. 2:3-4)

Scripture plainly speaks of condemnation for those who are not “in” Christ Jesus. As a second part to the above question, how can someone be both forgiven and condemned?

Scripture also speaks of there being no condemnation to those who are in Christ! This apparent contradiction is resolved when we understand that *in Christ* both of these things can be true at the same time!

Because all live, move and have their being in Jesus and are sustained in Jesus, whatever happens to Him happens to all things created in Him. This means, fundamentally, Christ has condemned, and condemns, no one (he only condemned sin), and because everyone is in Him, no one is condemned from God’s side! (John 1:3-4; Acts 17:28; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:2-3; Rom. 5:18; Col. 1:19-20)

However, just because we are not condemned by God, doesn’t mean we can’t condemn ourselves and others. In fact, even though God never does condemn us, we absolutely condemn ourselves and others!

This is part of the problem inherent with sin and our distinction. In our distinction, we can and do believe the lie that says we are condemned even though the truth about ourselves in Jesus says we are not!

So, this is not an “either/or” subject, but a “both/and” subject as you hinted at in the last sentence of your question. We can be both forgiven (totally by God) and condemned (by the devil, self, and others.)

Jesus spoke in parables to shield the truth, especially from the Pharisees. When the disciples asked about this, he mentioned that he did not want them to understand, turn, and be saved. Why would he specifically exclude them from salvation if all are saved by his death and resurrection?

If you look at the gospels as a whole you see that Jesus’ entire ministry is one in which he is not believed. Even the disciples don’t understand his life or his parables.

It’s not until after his resurrection and the revelation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost that anyone (Pharisee or disciple) begins to understand who Jesus is and what he is talking about.

A major part of Jesus’ ministry before his death is confronting our human self-righteousness and hypocrisy. Both the disciples and the Pharisees think (as we all do at some point in our lives) that our salvation depends on what we do. Jesus’ ministry to them demonstrates that they are not capable of doing what needs to be done to save themselves.

Therefore, Jesus will save us by doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Namely, crucifying our sinful humanity and resurrecting us as new creations.

So, at the point when Jesus makes these statements about the Pharisees it is not yet time for them to understand the true nature of salvation. In fact, subsequent events show it wasn’t yet time for the disciples.

Now that Jesus has crucified our sinful humanity (Col. 2:11) and the Father has raised us up with him (Eph. 2:6) the time has come for all humanity to turn from the lie that we are not saved and believe the truth that we are saved (Col. 1:20; 2 Cor. 6:2.)

Jesus is not excluding the people who don't understand his parables from salvation, he is excluding them from understanding salvation at that point in their lives. The only way someone can be excluded from salvation is if they are not part of "all things in heaven or earth" (Col. 1:20.) Since the Pharisees are clearly part of all things "on earth" they are reconciled to the Father, but their understanding of that reality is being blocked by Jesus' use of parables at that stage in his relationship with them.

In this light it's interesting to note that Acts tells us that many who were against Jesus during his ministry before his resurrection believed in him afterwards (Acts 6:7) and some were even beginning to believe in him before his death and resurrection (John 12:42.)

Jesus didn't want the Pharisees, or anyone else really, including his disciples, to get the cart before the horse. First he would save humanity through his life, death, resurrection, and ascension and then we would believe.

Regarding the Son of God remaining human (incarnate) forever:

- a. So why isn't he on earth now? He has to stay in flesh, yet he's not here with us (John 1:14 NIV). His dwelling isn't among us if he's in heaven.
- b. How can we ever be righteous if Jesus goes back to Heaven? He's with us all, but not as a human. When Jesus was human, after his resurrection, he wasn't everywhere all the time. We don't read one person saying, "He was with me" at the same time someone else saying, "He was with me," at the same time as someone else....
- c. Jesus is inside you and you're inside him, but if He is human he can't be inside all of us all the time.

Regarding the first part of the question: The reason the forever incarnate Son of God, Jesus, is not on earth with us is because we are in heaven with him!! Ephesians 2:6 says *And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.* Because the Son remains forever incarnate we remain forever seated in heavenly realms with him and in him.

We don't now see this reality with our five senses, so we have to believe by faith that what Jesus says to us about himself and ourselves is true (Heb 11:1.) Some day there will be an apocalypse ("unveiling" in Greek) and we will see that "the dwelling of God is with humanity" (Rev. 21:3.) In the incarnation of the Son heaven and earth have become one.

You say "he's not here with us" and then reference John 1:14 but John 1:14 says the exact opposite of that. It says "he has made his dwelling among us." In other words, the Son of God has entered permanently into our world and taken us permanently into his world.

This also helps answer the second part of the question, "how can we ever be righteous if Jesus goes back to Heaven?" The answer is because Jesus has not left us here, *he has taken us with him.* Because he is "God with Us" (Emmanuel) he takes us with him wherever he goes. If he ever stops being incarnate, stops being human, then he stops being Emmanuel and we are left on our own.

Finally, part three: Jesus can be inside us all of us because he has two natures, God and Human. By virtue of his nature as God he can be present everywhere at once and by virtue of his nature as Human he is present in all humanity.

It is in questions like these that we must hold on to the Truth and mystery of God in Christ. Jesus is the Son of God *as a Man*. He is fully God and fully Man at one and the same time! As God he can absolutely be and IS in (intimate) connection with us at all times! Prior to his resurrection Jesus was limited to our same type of limited humanity EXCEPT that he was completely responsive to the Holy Spirit in his divine and newly created humanity. Now that he is resurrected he has returned to the glory he had with the Father before the world began (John 17:5) and that includes omnipresence.

Keeping this doctrine of the Incarnation together with our doctrine of the Triune God, there is a great mystery at work that no human concepts or word can describe! All we can say is that the witness of Christ, the early Church, and the bible is that the Son of God, as a Man, shares all that He is and has *with us* in his relationship with his Father in the communion of the Spirit!

As one wise theologian said, "It is better to worship and adore God, than to try and explain or understand Him!" The more we apprehend God, the more we know we cannot comprehend him!

Is there a verse that says Jesus is human forever?

Yes! Colossians 1:19 is one very definitive scripture, especially in Greek. This scripture says that God was pleased in all of his fullness to dwell in Christ. The word "dwell" is the word "katoykeo" in Greek and literally means, "to house permanently." Therefore, this verse should read that "God in all his fullness was pleased to house himself permanently in Christ."

Most of the Gospels and epistles make this clear, too, as they refer to Jesus Christ in the present tense even after his ascension. In other words, the same Jesus they saw ascend is still there, as mediator between God and man, and is coming back the same way he left.

Other verses make the concept equally clear. In Luke 24:39 the resurrected Jesus says that he has flesh and bone. He is still incarnate! Incarnate means literally in Latin "in the flesh" and that is what the risen Jesus says, "I am in the flesh."

All four gospels make it clear that after just three days in the grave Jesus' body was gone. There wasn't time for it to rot away, so where did it go? 1 Corinthians 15 explains that when the body is resurrected it is transformed from corruptible to glorified. The absence of a decaying body in the grave is a clear demonstration to us that Jesus was resurrected bodily and continues to live in humanity, now glorified.

If we take a position that says that the Son of God is not human forever then we have to explain what happened when the Son became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

One explanation would be to say that the Son of God only "appeared" human but wasn't really. This is what the ancient heretics known as the "docetics" said. They believed that the Son of God just "seemed" to be human, he didn't take on real human flesh he just appeared to be human. Therefore he didn't really suffer, he just appeared to suffer.

In response to this heresy the ancient church Fathers said "the unassumed is the unsaved." In other words, if the Son of God didn't enter into real human flesh (i.e. assume humanity) then real human flesh is not saved.

Another explanation would be to say that the Son of God entered human flesh for 33 years and then left it. If this is the case then we have no basis for calling the Son of God

“Jesus”. In this scenario Jesus was a man who lived and died and whose body was either stolen from his grave or rotted away there. In this explanation the Son of God would exist forever but there would be no Jesus forever.

This is why the constant and numerous references specifically to “Jesus” in every book of the NT are a scriptural witness in themselves to the Son of God’s forever incarnation. If he doesn’t remain forever incarnate as Jesus then we should address him as “Son of God” not “Jesus.” The fact that we call him Jesus indicates that at our deepest soul level we know he is the same man who was born in Bethlehem, suffered on the cross, and was bodily resurrected on the third day.

The early church resolved these questions between 200-400 A.D. As a result all Christians throughout the world, Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox hold the same doctrine: that the Son of God became incarnate and remains incarnate. For example, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of The Christian Church* says that the Christian doctrine of the incarnation “asserts an abiding union in Christ’s Person of God-head and Manhood.”

If Jesus is still incarnate, why does he (and Stephen) say, "take my spirit" (Luke 23:46, Acts 7:59)?

At the most basic level this phrase just means “take me!” This is especially true since Jesus and Stephen were both Jewish. Hebrew thought did not distinguish a soul or spirit that could be separated from the body, but simply saw human beings as living souls (Heb.= “nephesh,” living soul or being.)

Both of their statements are translated into Greek, most likely out of the Aramaic (a cognate of Hebrew) that was the everyday language of 1st Cen. Palestine. So when they cried out in Aramaic “take my spirit” or life or soul or essence of my being (however we understand that Hebrew/Aramaic thought) it was translated into Greek as “pneuma” and then to English as “spirit.” Yet the thought is a Hebrew thought, not a Greek or English one. So it may be better understood as “take me, take the essence of who I am.”

Throughout the centuries Christianity (Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant) has understood the spirit/soul of a person to go to Jesus at death and the body to return to the ground from which it was made.

When the person is resurrected the spirit/soul will be reunited with the now glorified body of resurrection and the whole person (the nephesh, living soul) will exist as a glorified human and as God originally intended when he set in motion his plan of adoption.

If we take this traditional model for thinking about resurrection and apply it to Jesus then Jesus’ soul was in hell, or the grave, (1 Peter 3:19, 1 Cor. 15:4a) from Friday evening to Sunday morning. At his resurrection his soul and now glorified body were reunited into a whole, living being and he lives forever now as the incarnate and resurrected Son.

If we take this traditional model and apply it to Stephen, his soul was received into Jesus’ presence at the moment of his death and is still awaiting reunion with his glorified body on the day of resurrection (1 Cor. 15:52.)

From our perspective in time and space Jesus has already experienced his resurrection (as the first fruits of those who will be raised, 1 Cor. 15:23) and now lives in the glorified flesh of the resurrection body forever.

Can you really call someone who can walk through walls human (as Jesus did when he appeared in the room where the disciples had the doors locked)? If the answer is that he was in a glorified body, then where does the Bible define two types of humans - the ones like us that are deteriorating and sinful versus the glorified ones?

Actually, the scripture doesn't say Jesus walked through walls, rather it says the doors were locked and he appeared in their midst. The risen Jesus isn't outside creation and popping in for occasional visits. He is in connection and communion with creation and appears in the resurrection scenes so that the disciples can bear witness to the reality of who he is.

So, no, I would not call someone who can appear at will in a locked room a human - but Jesus does! The question, then, is who knows more about what a human is - Jesus or me?

In the same story where Jesus appears in the locked room he tells the disciples that he is not a ghost (Gr.= "pneuma," spirit) but that he has flesh (Gr.= "sarx," human flesh/physical body) and bone (Gr.= "osteon", bone.)

In other words, he is telling them (and us) that a flesh and bone human being can appear in a locked room - if he's been resurrected!

The disciples are much like us. They don't think you can be human and appear and disappear at will, so when they see Jesus enter the locked room without going through the door it scares them and using their human reason they conclude he is not human but a spirit.

Jesus then corrects their human reason by explaining to them that he is a human being, he has flesh and bone. He is a human being with a resurrected and glorified body.

You may not like the term "glorified body" but it comes from the bible. In 1 Corinthians 15:43 the Holy Spirit inspires Paul to write that the physical body is "sown in dishonor, it is raised in *glory*."

To really understand the nature of the resurrection - both Jesus' resurrection and our own - it is very helpful to read all of 1 Corinthians 15 and study what the Holy Spirit is teaching us. After all, who knows more about what a human is: us or the Holy Spirit?

In Corinthians Paul is writing to Greek speaking and Greek thinking Christians who think the way we do: either you are spiritual or you are a human with a body but you can't be both. Yet Paul tells them that the state of resurrection is to be a "spiritual body" - to be both at the same time! (1 Cor. 15:44.)

In other words, the Son of God becoming incarnate has redefined what it means to be human (Eph. 2:15.)

Let's take a brief look at what 1 Corinthians 15 says about the nature of resurrection.

First of all, Paul says that Jesus' death and resurrection is the message of good news from God (the gospel) that the apostles preached (1 Cor. 15:1-11.)

Then he acknowledges that some people are saying there is no such thing as resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12.) If there is no such thing as resurrection, Paul says, then Jesus is not resurrected and we are not saved and the gospel is a lie (1 Cor. 15:13-19.)

So we need to be sure we know what the bible means when it says “resurrected” because the heart of the gospel is the resurrection of Jesus. He IS the Resurrection! (John 11:25)

Later in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul explains very carefully what “resurrected” means. It means:

- A body raised imperishable (1 Cor. 15:42)
- A body raised in glory (1 Cor. 15:43a)
- A body raised in power (1 Cor. 15:43b)
- A body raised as a spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:44)

So, if we substitute the definition of the word “resurrected” for the word itself then what Paul is saying is this:

If Christ has not been raised in a body that is imperishable, glorified, in power, as a spiritual body, then our preaching is useless and so is your faith. (1 Cor. 15:14)

Ouch! Paul just told me that if I don’t think a human can be raised as a glorified body of power (that appears and disappears at will) then my faith is useless. Come on, Paul, go easy on me, please!

Of course, Paul goes on to say that Christ has been resurrected (raised in a glorified, spiritual body) and that he is the first fruits of a new kind of humanity. What he is, we will become at the moment of our own resurrection (1 Cor. 15:52-57.) So, in a way, there sort of are two kinds of human beings. The first fruits (Jesus) who have already gone through the transformation of resurrection and the rest of us who are still waiting for our transformation to come (1 Cor. 15:20-34.)

It’s in this context that Paul acknowledges that some people will be skeptical because they can’t imagine what kind of body this resurrected body would be – how can a human be both flesh and spiritual at the same time? (1 Cor. 15:35)

Then he says we’re foolish to even ask such a question! (1 Cor. 15:36a) Ouch! Paul just told me that I’m foolish to think human bodies can’t be resurrected as glorified, spiritual bodies! Come on, Paul, cut me some slack, please!

Why does Paul think I’m foolish for feeling that a “real” human being can’t be in a glorified body – the kind of body that can appear and disappear at will?

I believe it’s because Paul thinks in Hebrew categories and not Greek categories. He doesn’t see the world as divided between heaven and earth, spiritual and physical. He doesn’t think there’s a yawning and uncrossable gulf between flesh and spirit.

He believes the physical world is good, not evil the way Greek thinkers tend to see it (Gen. 1:31.) He believes God has chosen to dwell with humanity, in humanity (Exodus 29:45, Ezekiel 37:27, Joel 3:17.)

This is the heart of the gospel. In Jesus the Son of God has become incarnate, he has entered into fleshly human nature and made his permanent dwelling there (John 1:14, Col. 1:19.) In doing so he has made fleshly human nature holy and glorified us by taking us up with him, in his resurrection, to the right hand of his Father (Eph. 2:6.)

Jesus, the Word of God in the flesh, is asking us to believe something new and revolutionary about human existence. He is asking us to trust him when he tells us that

the destiny of the human body is not destruction but glorification through resurrection because he, the glorious and resurrected one, is forever incarnate in human nature.

In one very fundamental sense, Jesus is the only real human being there is, but he is graciously sharing his new humanity with us. St Athanasius said, correctly, that sin was causing us to lapse into non-being (or non-humanness), and indeed, our sinful humanity must be put off like old clothing, which is why our bodies still die. We must be clothed with Christ's humanity in order to live as the kind of human beings the Triune God originally envisioned for us in our adoption.