

SOLVING A PRONOUN PROBLEM IN 1 CORINTHIANS 15

Series: A Little Bit of This...A Little Bit of That
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INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

- **Observation:** A challenging issue emerges from the use of the pronoun "we" in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.
 - Pronouns are critical for interpretation.
 - Misidentifying the referent can lead to doctrinal confusion.
- **Textual Example 1 – 1 Corinthians 12:13**
 - Quote: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body..."
 - "We" here clearly refers to the Body of Christ.
 - This includes both Jews and Gentiles in the Church.
- **Textual Example 2 – 1 Corinthians 15:51–52**
 - Quote: "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep..."
 - Initially seems to reference the same group.
 - However, the mention of "the last trump" recalls Jewish prophetic language, not typically associated with the Church, and is in the context of kingdom inheritance.
- **Critical Questions for this Study**
 - Are both uses of "we" referring to the same group?
 - If not, when and where does the shift occur?
 - What are the implications of this shift?
- **Why This Matters**
 - It is critical that we understand passages carefully so that we do not create doctrinal confusion.
 - If 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 is about "we, the body," then the Kingdom belongs, in some way, to the body.
 - Understanding the pronoun shifts clarifies Paul's intent and the doctrine he is teaching.

THE CASE FOR 1 CORINTHIANS 15:51–52 BEING ABOUT ISRAEL

- **Premise 1: The Problem in Verse 50**
 - "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."
 - The Body of Christ is not said to inherit a kingdom; this is Israel's promise.
 - Therefore, the problem being addressed is distinctly Jewish—how can a rebellious, carnal nation inherit a spiritual kingdom?
- **Premise 2: The Mystery Involves Sudden Transformation**
 - "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed."
 - This is not a mystery about resurrection in general—that was already known.
 - The mystery is how Israel, without dying, is changed to inherit her kingdom.
- **Premise 3: The Timing is the Last Trump**
 - The "last trump" has prophetic resonance with Israel, not with the Church.
 - This aligns with passages like Isaiah 27:13 and Matthew 24:31, where trumpets gather Israel.
 - It is difficult to fit this timing into any reasonable pre-tribulational rapture view.

THE SHIFT IN THE MEANING OF "WE"

- **All Pronouns From 12:13-15:41 Are Inclusive Of The Body Of Christ**
 - 12:13, 13:9, 12, 15:19, 30-32
- **The Change in Pronoun Scope Occurs at a Critical Juncture**
 - In 1 Corinthians 15:35–49, the subject is explicitly "the resurrection of the dead"—a broad doctrinal category that includes **all who are raised**, both **just and unjust**.
 - v. 42, "the resurrection of the dead" is not specific to the righteous dead.
 - In verse 49, Paul states:

“And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.”

- Here, the pronoun **“we”** is **general**, encompassing **all humanity**, since all have borne Adam’s image.
- The statement about bearing **“the image of the heavenly”** does not inherently limit itself to believers. It refers to the resurrected state—a body no longer subject to decay or death. Even the damned, who are cast into the Lake of Fire, are not described as corrupting or dying again. Their bodies endure (Rev. 20:10).
- In verse 50, however, the subject changes:

“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God...”

- This marks a narrowing of focus: the **“we”** here now **excludes** the general population and instead refers to the **“brethren,”** those who are eligible to inherit the Kingdom
- Inheritance of the Kingdom is not a universal resurrection theme—it is a prophetic promise specifically made to Israel. Paul’s readers needed to understand that natural bodies, even when resurrected, do not inherently qualify to inherit the coming earthly kingdom.
 - Inheritance in the Kingdom is not **“to all who are resurrected,”** but only to those who qualify. See Daniel 12:1-2.
- **The Mystery in 15:51–52 Is Kingdom-Specific**
 - When Paul says, **“BEHOLD, I SHEW YOU A MYSTERY...”**, he is not introducing the resurrection itself, which was already known in Jewish Scripture (and thus not a mystery).
 - The transformation **“in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye”** at **“the last trump”** should be read in light of **Israel’s prophetic program**, not the **mystery of the Body of Christ**. Here are some related passages to provide support to the **NEED** for Israel to be transformed.
 - Ezekiel 36:26-27 - God promises to give Israel a new heart and spirit
 - Jeremiah 31:31-34 - The New Covenant promise of internal transformation
 - Romans 11:25-27 - The mystery of Israel’s future salvation
 - Note that none of these show **HOW** Israel is going to be transformed, only 1 Cor. 15:51-52 gives this mystery.
 - This is not a Rapture text in the Pauline mystery sense. Rather, it explains how a remnant of Israel, who could not inherit the kingdom in natural flesh, will be changed to do so—fulfilling prophecy, not revealing the mystery.

CONCLUSION: SIMILAR, BUT NOT THE SAME

- The event described in 1 Corinthians 15:51–52 appears to resemble the rapture, but is not the rapture.
- This is Paul’s explanation of how Israel, still stubborn and fleshly, will be changed to inherit her long-promised kingdom.
- “Things that are similar are not the same.”

This framework shifts the referent of **“we”** in verse 51 away from the Body of Christ and toward the prophetic destiny of Israel.