

The Resurrection of the Body

I Corinthians 15:35-49

**A sermon preached by Dr. Calvin Warpula
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Everyone here and everyone living on our planet has a body. It is in this earthly, physical body that we live. Did you bring your body with you this morning? Of course, because everything we do, we do in the body. This body is part of our identity. We distinguish ourselves from one another by our bodies, by our DNA, by our fingerprints, by our voice prints, by our looks, and our appearances. Each of us has a name, an address, a Social Security number, a birth date, and a mother and father that distinguish us from every other human being on earth.

This body we live in is really us. We cannot separate ourselves from our body. We cannot imagine our appearance without our body that makes us uniquely who we are.

What's going to happen to our bodies? We are growing older every day. We try to cover up our age with ant-aging creams, botox, hair coloring, and hairpieces but the years just keep marching on. We are still getting closer and closer to the sunset with every heartbeat, every breath, and every minute.

We know we shall die. Unless Jesus comes first, all of us will be dead within one hundred years, and many of us within 20 years. We are never too young or too old to die.

We have trouble letting go of the body. This is why people do foolish things on the way to death. A terminally ill woman had her hair set by a professional hairdresser every day for three months so that she would look her best in death. One man who had never paid more than \$200 for a suit, knowing he had only a few months to live, spent \$5000 to fly a tailor from New York to have an Italian suit made for his corpse. Another woman signed a contract with her plastic surgeon and her undertaker, providing that when she died the surgeon was to assist the undertaker in making whatever skin tucks were necessary to make her look younger in her casket. One man said when his wife died, "Let's have lots of flowers to try to make this thing look as good as we can."

Philosophers who didn't know the Christian gospel said some awful things about death. Aristotle wrote, "Death is the most terrible of all things, for it is the end." Epicurus said a similar thing: "Death is the most terrifying of all things."

Sophocles said, "Of all the great wonders, none is greater than man. Only for death can he find no cure."

So what's going to happen to our bodies when we die? God made us originally out of the dust of the ground. Our bodies will go back to dust. The Bible says, "Dust you are and to dust you shall return."

At death, our body and spirit are separated. The Bible says, "The body without the spirit is dead." According to the Bible, the spirit does not die, go out of existence, or perish with the death of the body. The inner self, called at times the soul, or at other times the spirit, departs and goes into the spirit world which is the unseen world, Hades. The spirits of the righteous are conscious, fully aware of whom they are, and what they have been through on earth. In Revelation 6, the spirits of the righteous martyrs cry out to God for him to avenge their blood on the earth. In Luke, chapter 16, Jesus said that Lazarus died and went to a place of comfort called Abraham's bosom. Stephen and Paul desired to go and be with Jesus when they died (Acts 7:59; Phil. 1:23).

The spirits of the wicked likewise are conscious and fully aware of who they are. They have full remembrance of life on earth. Jesus spoke of the rich man who died and lifted up his eyes in torment. This was immediately at death. He knew who he was, who Abraham was, who Lazarus was, and he remembered his five brothers yet living on the earth (Lk. 16:19-31).

Jesus, the second person in the Godhead, became flesh and dwelt among us. He died on the cross for our sins. Three days later, God raised him from the dead. He spent the next forty days with his disciples. They ate and drank with him, they handled him, and they observed him closely. He discussed the Scriptures and the plan of God with them. He ascended into the clouds into heaven. As he left, he told them that he would come again. When he comes, Jesus said that he would raise all the dead and judge the world (Jn. 5:28-29).

In their preaching the apostles always proclaimed the death of Jesus for our sins and his powerful resurrection three days later that verified who he was: the son of God and the one and only savior of the world. The apostles of Jesus boldly preached that there would be a resurrection of the just and the unjust (Acts 24:15).

When Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, he told them that Jesus would come again (I Thess. 4:13-5:11).

So the Bible teaches that Jesus is coming again, that he will bring the spirits of the righteous dead with him, that the living believers on earth at the time will be instantly changed to have the same type of glorified body as Jesus, and that the bodies of the deceased righteous will be resurrected to be reunited with their spirits. The wicked will also be resurrected at the same time but the Bible does not describe the type of body they will have.

The righteous and the wicked will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Those in Christ will receive their eternal rewards and hear the blessed call of Jesus, "Come, you blessed, into the inheritance planned for you from the foundation of the world. You are good and faithful servants." The righteous will go into the eternal heaven to be there with God in perfection forevermore.

The wicked will be condemned for their unbelief, for their refusal to accept the gospel, and for their sins that they habitually and continually practiced. The Bible says that the Lord will say to them, "Depart from me you cursed. I never knew you." The wicked will be sent into hell to suffer in torment because of their rejection of God and his gospel.

You probably have some questions today about what is going to happen when Jesus comes back. There were some with questions in the times of Jesus and the apostles, too.

The church that Paul established in Corinth, Greece, seemed to have the most questions. About A. D. 56 Paul wrote a letter to them where he answered their questions. Please open your Bible to I Corinthians chapter 15, the longest, extended teaching on the resurrection in the Bible.

In vs. 12-20, Paul reasons that the resurrection of Jesus guarantees our resurrection. Some at Corinth doubted any future resurrection of the body. They were probably possessed by the common Greek idea that our souls are immortal but our bodies just waste away to nothing and are thrown out like trash into the garbage dump we call a grave. They would affirm that at death we just fly away to God and are forever rid of this body of flesh that is a dying corpse that hinders our true spiritual freedom. The Greek view was that this material, physical body is part of the evil of this world and man can look forward to when this albatross of flesh is shucked off and forever discarded. The Greeks believed there was something inherently good and immortal in the soul, and that there was a happy immortality without God and without a body.

This idea is still popular today. This view accounts for the idea of reincarnation, i.e., that a soul is immortal and keeps coming back in different forms. This view says that life goes on automatically, at least in some form, forever. In some funerals you hear pagan philosophy mixed in with Christian teaching to form a non-Christian amalgamation, a hodge-podge of theology, new age-ism, and Greek thinking. All this nonsense talk about the spirit of the deceased merging into the sunset or into the gentle breeze or the rain is pagan and totally non-biblical.

Paul teaches, instead, the resurrection of the body. Resurrection means that someone must do the raising. That someone is God. God raises the dead. The resurrection centers on God and God's power.

Believers in Jesus the Christ are linked to Jesus by our baptism into fellowship with him. Our baptism is a picture of his death, burial, and resurrection. If Jesus has been raised from the dead, then, we who believe in him will be raised likewise. To deny the resurrection of our bodies is to deny also the resurrection of Jesus in his body (15:1-11).

In v. 20, Paul goes on to say that the resurrection of Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection of those who have died. The first fruits were the first crops of fruit or grain to be harvested. The first fruits guarantee that there is more coming. There will be more just like it soon when it ripens. Jesus being the first fruits means that his resurrection is the first of many that will follow and be like his. His resurrection guarantees the coming harvest of others similar to him.

In v. 21, Paul writes that as one man, Adam, brought death into the world, so one man, Jesus, brought life to the world through his resurrection.

See v. 22 then: "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." In the flesh we inherited from Adam, we all die. But all those in Christ, by virtue of faith in Christ and baptism into him, will be resurrected. All those connected to Adam die, but all those connected to Jesus will live.

Paul does not discuss the nature of the body of the wicked when they are resurrected. This does not concern him. God will take care of that matter. That is his business. What I'm interested in is what happens to me as a believer and what happens to friends of mine that are believers. God has assured us believers that we will be raised to be with Jesus and to be like Jesus forever.

A question that we have is the same one the Corinthians asked: "What will the resurrected body be like?" (v. 35).

Paul says that the body is similar to a seed that is planted in the ground. The seed is small, hard, and brown. It germinates and makes a plant that is large, juicy, and green. It is the same life--the same name--just in a different form. There is continuity between the seed and the plant, yet there is a difference. A transformation occurs. I have some apple seeds here in this hand; and here is an apple in this hand. Seeds like these produced an apple tree that produced this apple. This apple was not produced by some generic apple seed but by one specific seed.

Likewise, our bodies are sown in the earth when we are buried. God can raise up out of that death and decay a new life form that is as perfectly suited to the world to come as this life form we now have is suited to this world. There is both continuity and transformation.

Take the resurrected body of Jesus, for example. Jesus lived bodily, died bodily, was buried bodily, and was resurrected bodily. There was a continuity all the way through. The Jesus of the resurrection is the same Jesus of the tomb, of the cross, and of his life here for 33 years. Yet, there were some differences. The

resurrected body of Jesus could appear and disappear. It seemingly could pass through locked doors. It could make itself unrecognizable. It could ascend into the air and into the clouds. It was the same body, yet it was changed.

Yet Jesus did not receive his glorified body at his resurrection. He retained his old body for evidential purposes and received his new body at his ascension into glory. The body of Jesus in the book of Revelation is glorified compared to the the body in the post-resurrection appearances. John, who saw Jesus in the resurrection, said that "we shall be like Jesus but it has not yet appeared what we will be." If the glorified body was exactly the same as Jesus' resurrected body then it had already appeared what we will be.

The resurrection of Jesus shows us that we will be resurrected, that it will be us, and we will not be something or someone else. We will not be zombies, unknowable and unknown, or floating spirits. I will still be me, though at first, you may not recognize me.

Have you ever looked through old family photos and school yearbooks? There you are as a one-year-old, there's another picture of you as a three-year-old, there you are as a seven-year-old, there you are when you were twelve, then here's one of you at age 16, there you are in college or in the army at age 19, there you are on your wedding day, and now look at you. If someone you knew when you were 13 were to meet you now, they might not recognize you. You are the same person inside, but you are different on the outside, right?

There is a numerical identity—one to one—it is you, it is not someone else pretending to be you, it is not a second person who had your name, it is you. There is much qualitative difference, but it is you. It was you when you were a fetus in your mother's womb, and what a difference there is in you now many years outside the womb, but it is still you. If when we were a fetus, we could see into the future and see ourselves as we are now, we would be astonished at the changes. The same is true if from our present life we could look far, far into the future after the resurrection and see ourselves in our glorified body. We will have deep and unimaginable changes or improvements, but it will still be me—a one to one identity—and it will still be you—a one to one identity. Perhaps our resurrection body will be as different as our present body is from when we were a fetus. So great qualitative change is consistent with numerical identity.

Paul used the analogy of seeds. He could have also used the analogy of caterpillars and butterflies. As you know, a caterpillar forms a chrysalis and after a little while breaks out into a butterfly. A beautiful Monarch butterfly soaring and fluttering was once a caterpillar crawling on a milkweed plant. It's the same life--the same organism--just in a different shape and form. Now if God does that now in the natural world, who is to say that he cannot change our bodies into a glorious body in the resurrection?

In verses 42-44, Paul says that is exactly what God will do. Paul describes the differences like this:

Perishable---imperishable. Our present body is subject to disease, decay and destruction. The resurrection body will be incorruptible or imperishable. It will not be subject to disease and death.

Dishonor---glory. The present body grows old and accumulates aches, pains, feebleness, and signs of decay. “We try to honor the dead at the time of burial by dressing them in their best clothes, providing an attractive casket, and surrounding the casket with flowers, but actually burial involves great dishonor. What could be more dishonorable for a body than to be lowered into a grave?” [Anthony Hoekema, The Bible and the Future, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979, p. 249].

Our new bodies will be glorious. It will not be ravaged by genetic effects, diseases, or accidents. The blind will see and the lame will walk. Every physical defect will be corrected. We will be redeemed from every effect of sin. God will remove all the marks on the body caused by sin.

Because of Jesus' need to prove that he was really the savior, and the same person, his body still had the marks of the cross upon it. I think this is a unique case for that reason and does not mean that those who are deaf, blind, amputated or deformed in this life will have a handicapped body like that for eternity. My little, five-year-old granddaughter, Parker Joy, will have a full left hand, not just the stump of an arm she has now. Our beloved blind couple, Richard and Martha Welch, will see perfectly. Robert Klein, in a wheel chair today, will be walking and running. We will have full and perfect bodies to serve God forever in the world to come.

Weakness----power. The present body is weak. It is limited. It cannot work long without becoming weak and tired. This increases near the end of life. Frailty and helplessness finally give way to death. The new body will be raised in power. It will never grow weary, never become exhausted, and never fail because of lack of strength.

Natural body----spiritual body. The present body is natural because it is suited to this life. It is natural, meaning that it has the nature and characteristics of animal life. It belongs to this environment. The new body is spiritual, meaning that it is adapted to the new environment. The new body will be perfectly adapted to the new environment of the heavenly world, the place where it will live.

You ask, "Does the resurrection mean that God will reassemble all the molecules in your body and reconstruct those same molecules into a new body? If so, how can God do this? When people die they become fertilizer for other living things and their molecules are absorbed into animals, plants, and so on for now thousands of years. People are eaten by cannibals that are in turn eaten by tigers.

Which body will they have in the resurrection? People are cremated in fires and their ashes are scattered over the sea where they are swallowed by fish or the ashes are strewn on plants and grass where they are absorbed into the food chain. How can God get bodies out of that?"

The Bible does not necessarily teach that God will re-assemble all the same molecules that form your body today. Actually, our molecules are constantly dying and being replaced. Scientists tell us that only half of the atoms that composed your liver just five days ago are in your liver today. Every seven years all the cells in our body have died and been replaced by other cells. If you are 21 years old, you have had three totally new bodies. If you are 49, you have had seven totally new bodies. If you are 77, you have had eleven totally new bodies. Which body will God raise up at the resurrection?

God is going to raise up a seed, or something that has some continuity with us. Nothing is impossible with God. If computers today can trace records and keep them forever, as it were, don't you think God can take care of the resurrection? Possibly one of the more appropriate analogies of the resurrection for our technological age is the computer. Our computer software is frequently upgraded. An upgrade has a continuity with the previous model but is new and improved. In the resurrection, we get our body upgraded.

The important thing to remember is that our hope in the resurrection is not based on what happens to our bodies after we die. We really don't know how resurrection will work or how God will bring a body back into existence. But this does not mean that this is impossible with God; it only means that we are ignorant of how God will do it. An omnipotent God who created the world out of nothing will surely have no problems with the resurrection of the body.

But, you may ask, "The Bible talks about this natural body and the spiritual body. (v. 44). Doesn't that mean that the resurrection body is not material, not physical, but only spiritual?"

No. The same Greek and English words "natural" [*psychikos*] and "spiritual" [*pneumatikos*] are used by Paul in chapter two, verses 14 and 15, of a "natural man" and a "spiritual man." The "spiritual man" is not a man who is nothing but spirit without a body but a man who is full of God's Spirit and who is attuned to the Spirit. Likewise, the same word *pneumatikos* in chapter 15 does not mean "a spirit" but a body that is energized and animated by the Holy Spirit versus one that is animated biologically. The word "spiritual" here is contrasted with "earthly." The earthly man is from Adam; the spiritual man is from Jesus, from heaven, from a life-giving spirit.

This is really the same contrast that was in vs. 42 and 43 that immediately precedes this: perishable, imperishable; dishonor, honor; weakness, power; and then natural body, spiritual body.

Paul is not saying that the resurrection body is not physical, does not have form, or is only a formless, bodiless spirit. If that were Paul's meaning, he would have said, "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spirit." There is no such thing as a spiritual *body*, meaning "a spirit with a body" because if it has a body, it is not a spirit. A body is corporeal. It has form and substance. It is physical and material. The Bible knows nothing of the resurrection of a spirit. It is always the resurrection of a body. We can no more speak of the resurrection of a body without a body than we can speak of a sunrise without a sun.

The body is like the "man from heaven" (v. 49). How was the man from heaven resurrected? Was he just a bodiless, formless, non-material, or non-physical spirit? No. Jesus arose bodily. He appeared bodily. The disciples touched him, he ate and drank, he ingested food, he swallowed food, he talked, and they saw the wound and prints on his body from the cross. He was as real as you are today. Jesus said to his disciples, "Touch me. You will see that a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see me having" (Luke 24:39). Jesus said, "Flesh and *bones*," not "flesh and *blood*." "Flesh and *blood*" indicates normal biological life, but "flesh and *bones*" indicates form and structure. That's the way we will be resurrected. We will be real.

You may ask, "Doesn't the fact that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven (v. 50) mean that we will not have a physical body?"

No. That is not what that passage means. The second part of the verse explains it: "the perishable cannot inherit the imperishable." This simply means that there must be a change. The aging, dying, mortal body that now is is not suited for the world to come. This present mortal flesh and blood cannot enter into the heavenly kingdom. It must be changed into the imperishable, glorious, honorable and spiritual body.

There are many questions we don't have the answers to. Really, what difference does it make? God will take care of us forever. In time and eternity, his arms encompass us like a giant parenthesis. All I have to do is one thing: Be faithful unto death, and he will take care of everything else.

So what does all this mean?

The resurrection of the body means that we believers will be raised to be like and with Jesus forever.

The resurrection of the body means that this world is only temporary. We are just passing through.

The resurrection of the body means that we are acting foolishly if we place all our emphasis on this world, on this present body: how it looks, its weight, shape, size, appearance, and its exercise, fitness, and clothing, and we forget about preparing for the world to come.

The resurrection of the body means that we will know ourselves, know others, and be known by Jesus and by the saints forever. We will know each other on the other side just as much as we have known each other on this side.

The resurrection of the body means that we will have our own unique individuality and personality forever. We will not be swallowed up in some mass formless, bodiless spirit state but we will be ourselves forever. You will have your own identity in the world to come. You will be you, as much as you are now.

If all this is true, then what should we be doing now, in this life, while we have time and opportunity?

V. 58, the last verse of this resurrection chapter, gives us the answer. [read it]

First, we should stand firm with the gospel. Be bold for Christ. Don't be afraid of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, atheism, materialism, humanism, secularism, or worldliness. Stand firm with Jesus. Stand up for Jesus.

Second, we should not let anything move us away from the gospel. Do not let life's problems, its sorrows, man's failures, man's indifference or his sins, your own physical illnesses or diseases, or temptations of any kind take you away from Jesus.

Third, we should give ourselves fully to doing God's work. Our work for the Lord is never wasted. No one ever serves Jesus and dies to regret it. The resurrection of Jesus proves that Jesus will come again. He will raise us up and change us into his likeness. Heaven will surely be worth it all. We'll be totally satisfied then forever and ever.

If today were the last day of your earthly life, would you go to meet God in peace with him? Or would you be caught unprepared, not ready, lost and away from God? The way you are living is the way you will die, and the way you die is the way you will be for eternity.

You have the option of moving from perishing to forgiven by accepting the free gift of God in Jesus Christ. Don't let another day go by without surrendering your life to Jesus Christ.

Believe in him today. Turn from your sins today. Be baptized in his name today. Let him wash away all your sins and give you his indwelling Spirit.

We'll help you today with all of that. All you need to do is to come forward and tell us that you are ready to obey Jesus Christ. Come now, while we stand and sing.

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