

The Resurrection of the Body and Why it Matters

When Christ returns, the dead will rise, they will be resurrected. “*With what body do they come?*” some ask.

Will their atoms be re-assembled?

Will there be male and female?

Will we recognise one another?

Will we look young, or old?

And many other questions are asked.

It is understandable that we ask.

But it is also true that we cannot understand what immortal life will be like, just as a foetus cannot comprehend what adult life is like, or a blind person has difficulty in understanding colour.

Perhaps being glorified will be like entering new dimensions that we have never known before.

We do not have the words to describe it because our words are based on our experiences in this physical life.

Just as we cannot describe the aroma of coffee, we cannot describe our future life.

Scripture does not give us a detailed description of what life will be like when we have glorified bodies.

But it does tell us:

1) **Romans 8:38-39** [NIV] “*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

We will be in God's presence forever.

2) **Psalms 16:11** [NIV] “*You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*”

We who trust in Christ will find it to be an immensely enjoyable life.

We will enter our Master's happiness, and in His presence there are pleasures forevermore.

We will never be bored, for we finite beings will always have new things to learn and enjoy about God's infinite goodness.

1 John 3:2 [NIV] “*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*”

Scripture also tells us that when Christ returns, we will be like Him.

Paul tells us that our bodies will be changed when the final trumpet sounds.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 [NIV] *“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and **we will be changed.**”*

And this brings us back to the question of what our bodies will be like.

There are two ways to study this question.

The **first** is to ask what kind of body Jesus had after his resurrection, and the **second** is to see what Paul wrote about our bodies in the resurrection.

We have limited information about both, but we can see how they might fit together.

The resurrected Jesus

Luke 24:13-16 [NIV] *“Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognising him.”*

After His resurrection, Jesus could be recognised as Jesus.

Special intervention was needed to prevent two disciples from recognising Him.

Jesus had flesh and bones, and some of the marks of crucifixion, but **no** blood is mentioned.

Luke 24:36-39 [NIV] *“While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”*

He could be touched, and He could eat.

John 20:19-20 [NIV] *“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.”*

Acts 1:9 [NIV] *“After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.”*

But Jesus could also miraculously appear in locked rooms, or ascend into heaven.

But is this the way Jesus now is?

Is there a five foot six inch body of flesh and bones somewhere in outer space?

Is Jesus normally invisible, or does His body shine in glory, or does He look like a lamb that has been slain, a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes?

Revelation 5:6 [NIV] *“Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.”*

Or are all of these appearances merely appearances, not necessarily a permanent shape or form?

Let us consider a couple of basic facts.

First, the disciples found the tomb was empty and the body of Jesus was gone.

Second, that the resurrected Jesus had a body, although that body had some extraordinary properties.

The simplest way to connect these two facts is to conclude that the body of Jesus was resurrected and changed.

The new Jesus had physical continuity with the old Jesus, but there were important differences.

Jesus does **not** have to remain visible to our eyes.

When He appeared, His body reflected photons; when He disappeared, it did not.

Yet in both states, Jesus had a body.

Jesus inhabits eternity, and He does not have to conform to the finite electromagnetic quantum world that we are able to investigate. And for that reason, Jesus' body does **not** have to conform to the dimensions that we know.

Our questions about “*size*” and “*location*” are based on limits that probably do not apply to Jesus Christ. Such questions may make no more sense than asking what purple smells like.

We are asking about a spiritual condition with physical terminology that is **not** suited for that condition.

Our resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:51 [NIV] *“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed...”*

Paul tells us that we will be changed, metamorphosized.

1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 53 [NIV] *“So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.” ... “For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.”*

Our body will then be imperishable, immortal, glorious, powerful and spiritual.

But yet it will be a body, and it will have some continuity with the old body.

1 Corinthians 15:37 [NIV] *“When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.”*

Paul compares this change to the sprouting of a seed.

An oak tree does **not** look at all like an acorn, but it has physical continuity with the acorn.

A butterfly looks nothing like a caterpillar, but it has physical continuity with it.

Our metamorphosis may involve an even more dramatic change in what we are like.

We cannot predict what it will be like any more than we can predict whether some unfamiliar seed will grow into a tree, or a flower.

The point is that there is continuity as well as change.

It is **not** like the old body is totally abandoned, nor is it totally kept.

We do **not** worry about reassembling all of the atoms that were once part of our bodies (that would be impossible, for bodies decompose after death and their atoms become atoms of other things, sometimes of other people's bodies).

But Paul still talks about the resurrection of the body.

Paul expects to find the tombs empty and the bones all gone. We do not know how this works, and suspect it involves realities we know nothing about.

Lacking any further information, we simply have to accept what Paul was inspired to write: The body will be raised, and it will have new qualities.

Some may ask, "*What is a spiritual body?*"

Isn't that a contradiction of terms?

No, Paul is talking about a body that is different from the bodies we know, but he is **not** talking about a body that is "made" of spirit.

1 Corinthians 15:44 [NIV] "*it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.*"

When Paul says that our current bodies are "*natural*", he uses the Greek word "*psychikos*", which is the adjective form of the word "*psyche*", or soul.

Paul is not talking about a body made out of soul, but a body that is characterised in some way by soul, [the natural life of the body].

Genesis 2:7 [NIV] "*the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*"

Humans are the combination of a physical body [dust of the ground] and spiritual entity [breath of life] put together are called a "*soul*" [King James] or "*living being*" [NIV] or a "*living person*" [Living Bible].

This is how we are in the "*image*" of God.

God is life inherent, the source of all life and He creates this life in all human beings.

Similarly, when he says the body will become a spiritual body, he uses the word "*pneumatikos*", the adjective form of "*pneuma*", or spirit.

He is **not** talking about a body made out of spirit any more than he is talking about a body made out of soul.

But the body will be characterised by spirit, perhaps in the same way that a spiritual person is, having the ability to understand spiritual things.

Galatians 6:1 [NIV] "*Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.*"

1 Corinthians 2:13-14 [NIV] "*This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit*

does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

We will not understand what this body is like until it is given to us.

Why bother with the body?

Why does God bother with our bodies?

Ecclesiastes 12:7 [NIV] *“...and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and **the spirit returns to God who gave it.**”*

Wouldn't it be far simpler to take our spirits to heaven and live forever with the Lord without any bother with a resurrection?

No-one claims to have a complete answer.

We do know that God created physical matter, and it is therefore good.

God did not make physical matter just to destroy it later.

Revelation 21:1-2 [NIV] *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.”*

He will keep the physical world in a renewed form, in a new heavens and new earth.

The physical body is not some evil thing that we need to escape from (as many non-Christians have taught).

Jesus had a physical body, and there was nothing wrong with that.

Colossians 1:19-20 [NIV] *“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”*

In fact, Jesus was made flesh for the very purpose of redeeming all things.

Romans 8:21 [NIV] *“...that the **creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.**”*

God is not abandoning the physical world, He is rescuing it.

The physical creation will be liberated from its bondage when we are transformed into glory. This salvation involves the “redemption of our bodies.”

Romans 8:23 [NIV] *“Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, **the redemption of our bodies.**”*

Yes, our bodies will be redeemed, **not** discarded.

Our bodies will be raised immortal and imperishable, freed from the decay that affects the physical world today.

Christ has made it possible, as shown in His own resurrection with a body that transcends the limits of space and time.

The fact that the physical world will be redeemed, the fact that our bodies will be raised, means that we must value the physical world that God has placed us in and made us part of.

We are to care for the creation and to care for our bodies.

We are to have environmental concerns and health concerns; we are to have interests in the biological and physical sciences.

We are **not** to abandon the world we live in, but we are to improve it in whatever small ways we can.

Similarly, we are **not** to abandon the social world we live in, but are to improve it when we can, working against evil and promoting justice.

The fact that our bodies will be redeemed and raised emphasises our need to be involved in the world in a positive way.

We are **not** escapists, merely biding time until time ends, but we are involved, letting Christ live in us and grow in us until we are raised with Him in glory and we see Him as He is and we share in His eternal joy.