

What about our bodies?

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[0 : 00] Well, do keep 1 Corinthians chapter 15 open in front of you. As you know, we've been going through a series called Life Thereafter. If you're joining us for the first time, we are in the third of a four-week series on that particular subject matter.

And it's a bit more doctrinal in focus. And so that means we won't be covering every verse of 1 Corinthians 15, but only those that are relevant to thinking about our subject matter today. But that is our main passage. So do make sure that it is open in front of you. And the majority of our time will be looking at verses from this passage. Well, let's pray again and ask God for His help. Father, as I come today again, please help me to proclaim Your Word in the power of Your Holy Spirit. I pray, Lord, that the truths we see today would indeed refresh us, that we would be more attuned with reality as You see it, and that in turn would give us encouragement and motivation to keep on pressing on to live for You.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Spiritual and physical. What comes to mind when those words are paired together?

[1 : 15] My guess is you're probably thinking opposites. Spiritual realities are invisible. Physical realities are visible. Spiritual realities are of God.

Physical realities are of this earth. And so spiritual realities are superior. And physical realities are inferior. Spiritual is better than physical.

They're opposites. Now come back in time with me to the first couple of centuries. And let me introduce you to a group of people called the Platonists and Neoplatonists.

These are Greek thinkers who were around during New Testament times and shortly after as well. And they are people who say that spiritual is better than the physical.

They're opposites. Neoplatonists will say, for example, that the body itself is a lower form, something bad, something negative, whereas the soul is a higher form.

[2 : 19] And according to them, we are actually souls. But regrettably, our souls are trapped in bodies as if in a prison.

And so an escape from the body is a good thing. Leave that cursed body behind. And platonic thinking has affected our understanding of life after death as well.

Think about it. How many people believe that when we die, our bodies will decay once and for all, while our spirits eternally go to God's presence in a spiritual realm called heaven?

I imagine that not just non-Christians, but even many Christians believe that's what the Bible actually teaches. After all, isn't the spiritual better than the physical?

And yet, as we'll see today and next week, the great hope of the Christian is not in a bodiless future in a non-physical realm.

[3 : 27] The great hope of the Christian is that they'll be bodily raised to life to forever enjoy God in the new creation.

And that's why in Romans 8 verse 23, Paul says we are eagerly waiting, not for heaven as popularly understood, but for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

That's why in the Apostles' Creed, we say we believe in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

In the Christian faith, the spiritual and the physical are not opposites. Now, this makes sense when we consider the Bible story as a whole.

The Bible begins with the conviction that we are created by God as an integrated body and soul.

Although we can distinguish between the two, they are not separate compartments, as it were, but to be taken holistically as aspects of our creatureliness.

[4 : 35] To put it another way, while the body and soul can be separated, they are not meant to be separated. God created us bodily creatures, and He said it was very good.

Unfortunately, our bodies also suffer from the curse of sin. It doesn't always function the way it's supposed to, nor does it always do what we want it to do.

And in the end, our bodies are cursed to die. And so when Jesus comes, He didn't come simply to redeem us spiritually.

He plans to redeem us wholly, body and soul. The Gospel is designed to meet humanity's need in its entirety. As the theologian Cornelis Venema puts it, redemption does not deny the goodness and integrity of creation.

It rather brings the healing and renewal of creation. And for that to happen, resurrection must happen. Death must be reversed fully.

[5 : 49] God's work of redemption will only be complete when the curse of sin is fully undone. And so this morning, we'll see how that happens in the life thereafter.

We will ask three questions. Firstly, how does our bodily resurrection come about? Secondly, what will our resurrection bodies be like? And thirdly, what difference does knowing this make?

And we'll mainly be in 1 Corinthians 15, but from time to time, we'll need to jump into other places in the Bible as well. And so let's make a start. Firstly, how does our bodily resurrection come about?

To answer that, come with me to 1 Corinthians 15 verse 20. I hope you have it open in front of you.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Paul says, you want to know the answer? Look, Jesus is risen. I don't just mean resuscitated. I don't just mean raised up to heaven.

[7 : 02] I mean he is physically and bodily raised to life. So what? What's the big deal? Well, Paul says, consider the Old Testament.

It doesn't talk very much about bodily resurrection. But when it does, it's very significant. Consider these pair of passages coming up on the screen.

In Isaiah 26 verse 19, we read this, And then come over to Daniel 12 verse 2, where we're told this, And so both these passages establish an expectation that at the end of time, when God judges the world, the dead will rise again.

And now, we find that for the first time in history, a dead man has risen, never to die again. His name is Jesus Christ.

In John 20 verse 25 and 27, we discover that Jesus' body retains the scars of the crucifixion. These scars, more than anything else, make clear to the disciples that the very one they saw crucified, is now standing before them in the very same body that had suffered.

[8 : 51] When Jesus was buried and three days later rose again, it wasn't as if a new body suddenly came into existence while the old body simply rotted away in the tomb.

No, Jesus didn't leave his old body behind and perform some sort of supernatural body transplant. He experienced a bodily resurrection.

And if that is true, then the future, the Old Testament anticipated, has now arrived. Jesus is risen, and so multitudes will follow in due course.

That's what the early Christians realized. The Old Testament is clear. Resurrection does not happen to one man only.

And so that's why Jesus is described as the firstfruits. In the Old Testament, the firstfruits is the first offering that comes to God while the harvest is still in the field.

[9 : 56] It's the first bit, the early bit of the harvest that you take in advance. Knowing very well that there's still a big harvest to come. And so Christ is the beginning of a harvest of men and women who will also one day be raised bodily to life when Jesus comes again.

That's what verse 23 is talking about. But each in turn, Christ the firstfruits, and then when he comes, those who belong to him. In Adam all die, and so in Christ, all will be made alive.

And that's how we know that after death, we will be raised bodily. Because Christ has already risen as the firstfruits, and all those in Christ will rise with him.

And so naturally, we ask our second question, what will our resurrection bodies be like? Like last week, let me give you a big picture answer first.

Here it is. Our resurrection bodies will be the same bodies we have that are nevertheless transformed. Our resurrection bodies will be the same bodies we have that are nevertheless transformed.

[11 : 21] To help us grasp this, Paul provides us with two analogies from nature in verses 36 to 38 and verses 39 to 41.

In verses 36 to 38, Paul points out the obvious. If you're a gardener, you don't sow plants, you sow seeds. And when a seed is buried in the ground, it's as if it's dead.

But that so-called dead seed can bring about new life. And so can God. Our bodies are going to the ground, but he can bring new life from dead bodies.

But here's the thing. That new life is not completely unrelated to the seed. It's not as if the seed and the plant are two completely different things.

No. It is the seed that becomes the plant. And likewise, it is the same body we have now that becomes our resurrected body.

[12 : 29] It is renovated, but not replaced. There is continuity between the seed and the plant. And yet, though there is continuity, there is also transformation.

After all, plants look completely different from seeds. Look at the seed, and you would never guess that one day, it will look like grains of wheat or ears of corn or whole bunches of cherry tomatoes.

Or here's something equivalent. Think of an embryo. This year, this year, we've had a bit of a baby boom in our church. And for those of you who are new moms, on that day when your baby was born, I'm sure you could never imagine that the embryo you saw has become the cutie that you now hold in your arms.

or indeed that in a few years' time, he or she would become an overactive toddler. And if we can picture God performing such radical transformation in the natural world, well, surely we can picture God performing such radical transformation on our dying bodies.

The plant came from the seed, but it is also unlike the seed. It has transformed. And so it is with us.

[13 : 59] Our bodies are resurrected, but they won't be the same. They will change. And God does this because he gives us bodies that are suited for our environment.

That's the point of the next analogy. in verses 39 to 41. As Paul points out, verse 39, not all flesh is the same. People have one kind of flesh or body.

Animals have another. Birds another. And fish another. Birds naturally live in the air. And so they have a body that is suited for them to fly.

Fish naturally live in the sea. And so they have a body that is suited for them to swim. Even the heavenly bodies of the sun and the moon and the stars are designed for the environment they are placed in.

And so God will make sure the resurrection bodies we have are suitable for the environment we will one day find ourselves in. The environment of the new creation.

[15 : 09] It will be in sync. And that's why our bodies will be transformed. Now, how can we be sure of this?

Because the Bible teaches us that our resurrection bodies will be patterned after Christ's glorious body. In other words, our bodies will be like Christ's.

This is clearly taught in Philippians 3, verse 20-21. But our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await a saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.

I notice that in this verse, Christ still has His body. And if Christ Himself isn't just a spirit floating around, that must mean that God really thinks the body is good.

Christ still has a body and He will transform our bodies to be like His. And so let's consider Christ.

[16 : 30] Notice the continuity between His pre-resurrection and post-resurrection body. For one thing, it's physical. You might remember that after the resurrection, Jesus suddenly appears to the 11 remaining disciples in a locked room.

And they are frightened because they think He is a ghost. But Jesus says to them, Luke 24, verse 39, 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. And then He asked them for something to eat.

And verse 42, They gave Him a piece of broiled fish. And He took it and ate it in their presence. Well, that's what our bodies will be like with flesh and bones and the ability to enjoy good food.

It's physical. And so in the life thereafter, Sarawak Laksa will probably still be there for you to gobble down to your heart's delight. And yet, Philippians 3.21 tells us that Jesus' body is a glorious

one.

[17 : 46] It's transformed. And so clearly, there is some difference between His pre-resurrection and post-resurrection body. Now here we enter mystery because we're not really told how this is so.

There are some tantalizing possibilities. Think for instance of the way that Jesus suddenly appears to His 11 remaining disciples. They're hidden in a room, the doors are locked, but suddenly He's with them.

What's happening here? We're not told, but sometimes it can sound like Jesus' resurrection body has the ability to pass through solid objects.

Now is that really the case? Is Jesus utilizing some special property of His resurrected body? Or is He simply just performing yet another miracle unrelated to His body?

And if it is His resurrection body that does this, does that mean our resurrection body can do the same? I think we must admit we don't.

[18 : 54] No. The Bible simply does not tell us. Instead, it is better to go to the clear statements of Scripture for a description of what our resurrection bodies will be like.

And so this is what we'll do by returning to 1 Corinthians 15 and specifically to verses 42 to 44. And from these verses, we can make four statements about our resurrection bodies.

So, statement one, our resurrection bodies will be imperishable, not perishable. now that means this.

Right now, our bodies are headed in the direction of decay and death. Our eyesight fails, our hearing worsens, our skin sags, our muscles weaken, our bones become brittle, our arteries harden, our memory deteriorates, and one day, our hearts will stop.

But the resurrection body is heading in the reverse direction. It will be immune to disease. It will be free of all defect.

[20 : 16] It will never wear out. I mean, just imagine that. No colds, no migraines, no vertigo, no aches, no COVID-19.

Instead, it will go from strength to strength. You know how after you spend a few months being very disciplined with your diet, your sleep, and your exercise, you sometimes begin to feel much better and less fatigue.

Well, it's a good feeling, isn't it? And that's what our resurrection bodies are going to be like all the time. Statement two, our resurrection bodies will be glorious, not inglorious.

Now, this one is a bit tricky with different theologians going for slightly different ways of describing what's happening here. But for the moment, this is what I think is going on.

Our current bodies will go to the ground in a state of dishonor. You know, it doesn't matter how nicely the undertaker dresses you. The point is, you're dead.

[21 : 25] And that is a dishonorable position to be in. For the decaying state of the body is exposed for all to see.

There is nothing in the body that can draw a sense of praise or awe. And that is the direction of our present bodies to a state where it can neither draw honor nor bring honor.

It doesn't matter even if you're a supermodel now. But when the body is raised, it will now be in a state of glory. Now perhaps that glory will be literally bursting forth like when Daniel 12 pictures those who are resurrected as those who shine like the brightness of the sun above.

But the bigger point is that the resurrected body has no shame associated with it. It's perfect. It brings honor to the person because the body now fully showcases how they are made in the image of God with nothing obscuring that image.

It will perfectly reflect God. It is glorious and so it will also bring glory to its creator, God.

[22 : 45] statement three. Our resurrection bodies will be powerful, not weak. Now right now our bodies are shaped by what they cannot do.

It is limited and hampered both by physical accidents and bad choices we have made in the past. Perhaps we drank the wrong stuff and ate too much.

Perhaps we indulged in stuff that we shouldn't have. So it becomes weak. More than that, whereas even our bodies should be used to glorify God and worship Him, we often use it in sinful ways instead.

We are also weak in the sense that we don't always harness our bodies to honor God. God. But our resurrection bodies will be characterized by what they can do.

They will be able to live resurrection lives to the full. Our bodies will be able to accomplish whatever is necessary to give glory to God.

[23 : 57] That's how it's powerful. Perhaps our brains will be sharper and our hands will work better. I look forward to that because I'm quite clumsy with my hands.

Now, we're not saying, of course, that we'll become omnipotent or powerful like God. We won't. We will remain creatures even in the new creation.

We will not have unlimited bodies, but we will have empowered ones. And the big reason for that is because of statement number four.

Our resurrection bodies will be spiritual, not unspiritual. Now, that sounds strange, doesn't it? It sounds like maybe what I said earlier wasn't correct after all.

Maybe we will be based as spirits or some sort of body that is made up of spiritual stuff, whatever that might mean. maybe the spiritual is indeed better than the physical.

[25 : 02] Well, the spiritual is indeed better, but better than the unspiritual, not the physical. Too often, we make the assumption that spiritual equals non-physical.

And so that's why we make the spiritual and the physical natural opposites. But that is to misunderstand what spiritual actually means. Spiritual doesn't mean non-physical.

To be spiritual simply means to be directed by God's Holy Spirit. To be spiritual is about being consistent with the character of the Holy Spirit.

If you like, to be a spiritual person isn't about substance, you know, what you're made up of. It's more about supervision.

Who runs the show of your life? And so the contrast Paul is drawing here is this. Right now, our bodies are still too often marked by self-interest and wanting to do things that grieve the Holy Spirit.

[26 : 19] They are unspiritual in this sense. but our resurrection bodies will experience the transforming power of the Holy Spirit 24-7 conforming us to Christ-likeness.

And that's why Paul goes on to say in verse 45, life. So it is written, the first man Adam became a living being, the last Adam a life-giving spirit.

Again, it sounds puzzling at first, but not when we understand the word spiritual rightly. Again, remember that spiritual doesn't mean non-physical. All Paul is saying here is that Adam received natural life from the breath of God.

that's why he quotes Genesis 2-7. But in contrast to Adam, Jesus, the last Adam, now breathes out resurrection or supernatural life, figuratively speaking.

Our physical bodies in Adam are natural, and so are perishable, dishonorable, and weak. But our physical bodies in Christ will be spiritual, and so are imperishable, glorious, and powerful, because Christ has made it full of spiritual life.

[27 : 42] Well, if you didn't quite get all that, I hope the big point is still clear. God cares about our bodies, and in Christ, after we die, we'll wonderfully be raised and get resurrected bodies and get transformed bodies.

That's the big point. God's love. And in a moment, we'll think a little bit more about what difference all this makes to us. But first, before we move on to our final question, let me briefly deal with two side questions that sometimes pops up whenever we discuss our resurrection bodies.

first. Firstly, what about those who don't trust in Christ? The Bible affirms, all will be raised.

That's what the Old Testament affirms in Daniel 12, verse 2, as well as what Jesus says in John 5, verse 28 to 29. We've read both those verses this morning. And you can look them up again yourself later.

The issue at hand is not the resurrection, but what verdict we will receive on Judgment Day. And the Bible doesn't really dwell on the nature of the bodies of the unrighteous as far as I can tell.

[29 : 00] I think all we can say is that their bodies will not be glorified. They will not experience the transformation of 1 Corinthians 15, verse 42 to 44.

And so in light of all this, our appeal to all who are not Christians today is simply to ask you to consider this question. Who is Jesus?

And where is He today? Is He in the grave or not? If He is, then all of us Christians are just fools.

But if He isn't, then that has massive implications for you and me. Jesus boldly said that He would rise from the dead. And if He was telling the truth about that, then He must be telling the truth about everything else, including His very identity and His very mission.

God is God. And He tells us that He is the perfect image of God, the very one who has a claim on your life.

[30 : 11] And Jesus says to come to Him will bring you joy. Today's subject, our resurrection bodies, is part of that joy. But to ignore Him would be foolish.

That's what He also says. And so you must find out more about Him if you don't know Him already. And we would love to help you on that quest in any way. Please let us know ASAP.

Stick around for announcements later when I talk about Connect Cards. Secondly, what about cremation? I think we can say a number of things here.

Firstly, as Christians, I hope it's clear from today that we are to treat our bodies, whether living or dead, with respect.

God clearly does. And secondly, we should recognize that in church history, many Christians opposed cremation. They practiced the burial of the dead, partly because they saw it as a counter-cultural witness.

[31 : 19] all around them, people often saw dead bodies as having no further purpose, and so to be disposed of. But Christians saw burying the dead as a way of showing that they saw things differently.

They believe that God will raise the dead. However, we must also be clear that nowhere does the Bible explicitly condemn cremation.

If a Christian in good conscience has weighed up different factors, including medical reasons and so on, and has chosen to cremate a loved one, we shouldn't say they have sinned.

And so my counsel is that we should do all we can to witness to the hope of the gospel. That's the big principle. Now, often that would incline us towards burial, since it more clearly points to our belief in Christ's resurrection, and thus the resurrection of the dead.

But a Christian has freedom in this area, and so this is advice, not a command. And we certainly shouldn't worry that God can't raise or transform a Christian who has been cremated.

[32 : 35] If God created the world from nothing, he can certainly do that. Well, let's get to our final question for today.

What difference does knowing all this make? First of all, it gives us great hope, doesn't it? It gives us a great hope amidst broken bodies.

Maybe we struggle with a lifelong chronic condition. Maybe we have a family member who has Alzheimer's, and you just feel helpless as you watch him or her deteriorate, as they begin to forget you, and your cognitive functions begin to decline.

Sometimes doctors talk about how such things are irreversible. But in Christ, praise him, that is not true.

It might not reverse itself in this life, but it will be reverse on that day of resurrection. Or maybe we struggle now with our body image.

[33 : 52] That's how we're broken. Maybe one or two of us even struggle with the gender of our bodies. That feeling of, it's just not right, though so far we haven't dared to admit it to anyone.

And whatever we do now, we know we just can't get satisfied. But praise God, one day you will experience your body as just right.

You will look at your body and be satisfied. Your body will no longer feel like a curse, but a blessing to you. That is the great hope of every Christian.

Second of all, it gives us a sense of wholeness to look forward to. Does it not? I wonder if you ever felt like a disintegrated self.

You feel like you're a walking contradiction with some parts of you feeling like a stranger to other parts of you. Perhaps one of the best examples of that is how your online self does not quite match your offline self.

[35 : 03] Your online self is disembodied, and though it's you, it also isn't you. It's a projection that doesn't quite match reality.

And you know that, but you just can't quite get yourself to fit together in the right way. But when we are resurrected on that final day, we are reintegrating body and soul, and there will be a sense of wholeness.

As those completely filled with the life of the Spirit, we no longer feel divided, but can live as a consistent whole, 100% in line with what Christ wants.

You will really be you, the way God made you to be. Do you long for that? I certainly do.

Third of all, it gives us a renewed motivation to live for Christ now. Romans 12 verse 1 calls on us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice unto God.

[36 : 15] But as we've been saying throughout this sermon, we know that it's difficult. All of us sin with our bodies. although it's quite a private matter, I'm sure that sexual sin in particular is a struggle for many of us.

And sometimes there are days when we feel like giving up in despair. But if we know God will indeed transform our bodies one day, that means we can go on.

There is a point to our struggle. we are not struggling with no reward inside. Because we believe that one day, our bodies, now called the temple of the Holy Spirit, will really be fit to be called as such.

That description will not be false advertising. There will be a day when our bodily struggles with sin will be transformed to rest.

And that helps us to keep going. And so let me ask you, as we finish, do you believe in the resurrection of Christ?

[37 : 35] If you do, that means you believe in your own resurrection one day as well. And that's why you say in the Apostles' Creed, I believe in the resurrection of the body.

So rejoice in that fact and live like it's true and let nothing move you. And instead, just always give yourselves fully over to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

let us pray. Let us pray. Well, Father, thank you again for this wonderful truth from 1 Corinthians chapter 15 about the bodies that we can look forward to one day, those bodies that are imperishable, that are glorious, powerful, and spiritual.

But Father, we know right now we still live in a world where bodies get broken and harmed and where bodies are used in ways that grieve you.

And so, Father, we pray and cry out, come Lord Jesus. And right now as we wait for that day, please will you help us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. Thank you above all for the Lord Jesus, that he is risen from the dead, that he is the first fruits of multitudes who will come after him.

[39 : 15] So would you help us to find assurance and confidence of our position in Christ this morning, and to invite all those who do not yet trust in Christ, who do not enjoy this status, to come to know him, and so to have this kind of future as well.

Father, we pray for those who are especially sick, who are experiencing some sort of issue with their bodies. We pray, Lord, that this today would be of great comfort and hope to them.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.