

Resurrection of the Body

Introduction:

If we look in the Third Article of the creed, we find the foundational claim that as Christians we believe in the resurrection of the body. Yet of all the core doctrines of the church, I think this may be the least believed and least discussed. Few people even pay enough attention to it for it to be a controversial topic. Many Christians simply do not follow this teaching. Instead, I find it more widespread that Christians speak of a resurrection of the soul without the body. Most people imagine that our bodies die but that our soul rises to heaven. This, however, is not traditional Christian teaching.

Much of this can be traced back to the early theologian Origen, who worked to combine the Greek philosophy of Plato with Christianity. For many followers of Plato's philosophy, our material bodies are like anchors that drag down our immortal souls. In applying this concept to Christian thought, Origen saw the physical world as being created to provide tribulations to humanity so that they would learn to focus on the higher spiritual reality. To Origen, the true identity of humanity is spiritual and not material. He particularly argues for this position in his commentary on Romans. Several aspects of Origen's thought were eventually condemned by the church, but his low estimation of the body has been incredibly influential within Christian thought. Many continue to insist that our bodies must be shed to enter heaven. Again, however, this is not traditional church teaching. In its creeds the church affirms the resurrection of the body.

What does it mean to affirm the resurrection of the body, and why is it important? In this, our passage from Romans 8 is quite important.

Written by:

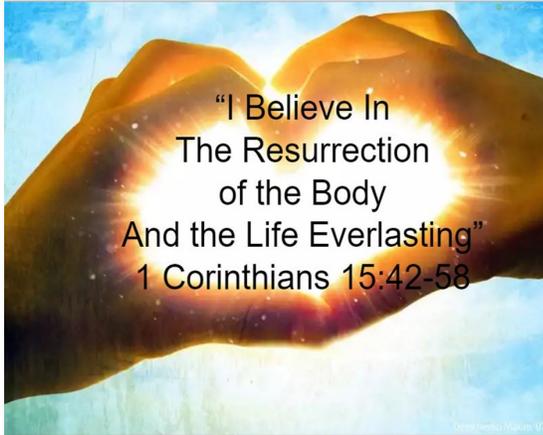
*Rev. Dr. Eric Trozzo,
Director of the Lutheran
Study Centre at STS.*

Bible Text: Romans 8:1-11

8 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,¹ who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. ⁷ Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. ⁸ So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ¹⁰ And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

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Law: The weak flesh cannot follow God's law. Therefore God sent the Son to do what we cannot. One who lives by the flesh cannot live by the Spirit. Living by the flesh leads to death, while living by the Spirit leads to life. Paul sets up here the serious problem in which we find ourselves. We are heading towards death because we live by the flesh, rather than living a life full of the Spirit. This sounds like a pretty clear proof that Origen is right. Our flesh keeps us from living as God wishes us to live.

Yet there is a great deal of confusion here. We must understand what Paul means by "flesh." Flesh should not be confused with "body." For Paul, the body, or *soma* in Greek, is neither good nor bad in itself. It is the material aspect of ourselves. When we use our bodies as God intends, they are good. When we do not, they become sinful bodies. When our bodies are misused and sinful, Paul calls them "flesh," or *sarks* in Greek. *Soma* and *Sarks* are not the same. Thus for Paul, living "*according to the flesh (kata sarka)*" means to live in an inappropriate way. Therefore he contends that when one's mind is set on the flesh one is hostile to God (verse 7). When we do not live as God wants us to, we are being hostile to God's will. The body is not the opposite of Spirit; the opposite of living by the Spirit is living sinfully.

Yet Paul holds in verse 3 that the law is weakened by the flesh. This suggests that the law on its own cannot drive out the power of sin, and more particularly it does not rid us of condemnation for our sin. In other words, simply being told that we should be good is not enough to make us good. God tells us that we should love one another and live righteously, and yet we fail to do this. Sin remains a strong power in our lives even though we know that God wants more for our lives. We misuse our bodies and make them a source of sin rather than a source of blessing. We turn our bodies into flesh. More than that, our mindset becomes one of being focused on flesh. We are more interested in sin than we are in God. This fascination with sin brings death to our bodies (verse 10). This is the natural consequence of sin; it is the condemnation that our sin rightly brings on us.

Gospel: Even though we are dead in sin, God does not leave us there. Because of Christ, there is no condemnation for our sins. This is an incredible word of grace already. We have been judged by God, and the sentence we have received is "no condemnation." We are freed of the penalty for our sin because of Christ. This is not something that will happen after we die, either; Paul says that there is no condemnation *now*. Effective immediately.

In the first sentence, then, we get an incredible word of grace. We are dead because we are so steeped in sin, and yet God will not judge against us. This is the grace of justification. It is the result of belonging to Jesus Christ. This first verse is the culmination of Paul's explanation from the previous several chapters. We have not earned this verdict; it has been granted to us through Jesus Christ. This word of grace is the gospel that we all need to hear.

Resurrection of the Body

Transformation:

Yet Paul does not stop with the words of grace, powerful though they are. God does even more than render a judgement of “no condemnation.” Starting in verse 2, Paul begins to discuss the new life that follows this verdict. This new life is life in the Spirit. It is a life where we are set free from the results of the law of sin and death. Instead of condemning us, Paul insists, God chose to condemn sin itself. God did this by sending the Son to deal with the sin of the flesh by taking on the “likeness of sinful flesh” (verse 3). We must remember here the distinction between “flesh” and “body.” Paul is saying that in the incarnation Jesus Christ took on a human body. Jesus was fully human. Yet it appeared to sinful humanity to be flesh, a body mired in sin. This is because sin is all that humanity knew and so could not see that Jesus was without sin.



Because he was without sin, he was able to condemn sinful flesh and offer up a vision of a sinless body. A sinless body is one that is filled with and led by the Spirit, rather than the fleshly body that is filled with and led by sin. This is the new life that Christ gives to us as well. It is a life in the Spirit because through Christ the Spirit dwells within us (verse 9). Rather than having our minds set on sin, through Christ our minds can be set on the Spirit. Life centered on the Spirit is a life at peace with God rather than of hostility to God’s law.

Indeed, life itself is the work of the Spirit. Life is known both physically and by being in relation to God. In the resurrection, Jesus was raised from death to life. Because the same Spirit dwells within us, our bodies too will receive new life. That is, our fleshly bodies will be transformed into Spirit-filled bodies through Christ. Our physical bodies will be cleansed of their sin, so that they no longer bring death and lead us away from God. Instead, they become blessings that allow us to live life fully. Our bodies are transformed from being in the flesh to being in the Spirit, and that means that they are full of life rather than death.

Theological Reflection

We can now return to the concept of the resurrection of the body. The Christian claim, then, is that our bodies are part of who we are.

They can indeed lead us into a life of sin, but through Christ they are also the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Because the Holy Spirit dwells within us, our bodies become a source of life and joy and connection with God. They are not anchors that pull our souls away from God. Our bodies and this physical world are God’s good creation that has been redeemed through Christ..

Continue page 4...



Theological Reflection

Continue from page 3...

This is not to say that physical death is not also part of the reality of this world. Yet we claim in faith that our bodies are renewed in Christ in some way, and we call this the resurrection of the body. In the life beyond this one, it will not only be our souls that are brought to dwell within God. Our bodies too will be part of this resurrection. We do not know for certain what this means. Certainly there have been various theological theories of what a heavenly body might be like, but in this life we cannot know for sure. Based on the resurrected body of Jesus we can guess that a heavenly body is in some ways similar to our earthly body and in some ways different. After all, many of the disciples were able to recognize Jesus after the resurrection, and Thomas was able to put his hands in the nail holes. At the same time, not all of the disciples recognized Jesus immediately, and Jesus was able to walk through walls after the resurrection. Again, we cannot know whether our heavenly bodies will be like Jesus' or not. What we do know is that God loves us for who we are, and our bodies are an essential part of us. God made us and this world to be good, and through the Holy Spirit brings out that goodness and makes it shine.

What do theologians say?

"Perish the thought that the omnipotence of the Creator is unable, for the raising of our bodies and for the restoring of them to life, to recall all [their] parts, which were consumed by beasts or by fire, or which disintegrated into dust or ashes, or were melted away into a fluid, or were evaporated away in vapors"
(Augustine, The City of God 22:20:1 [A.D. 419]).

"For the Church, although dispersed throughout the whole world even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and from their disciples the faith in . . . the raising up again of all flesh of all humanity, in order that to Jesus Christ our Lord and God and Savior and King, in accord with the approval of the invisible Father, every knee shall bend of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue shall confess him, and that he may make just judgment of them all"
(Irenaeus, Against Heresies 1:10:1-4 [A.D. 189]).

"Indeed, God calls even the body to resurrection and promises it everlasting life. When he promises to save the man, he thereby makes his promise to the flesh. What is man but a rational living being composed of soul and body? Is the soul by itself a man? No, it is but the soul of a man. Can the body be called a man? No, it can but be called the body of a man. If, then, neither of these is by itself a man, but that which is composed of the two together is called a man, and if God has called man to life and resurrection, he has called not a part, but the whole, which is the soul and the body"
(Justin Martyr, The Resurrection 8 [A.D. 153]).

Songs and Hymns:
#164 Christ is Risen, Alleluia.
#172 Praise the Savior, Now and ever

Prayer: I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.
Amen.



Human beings: Created in God's Likeness

The Bible begins with two stories of creation. We often think the first story (in Genesis 1) is more cosmic, while the second (Genesis 2:4 and following) is about human identity and relationship to God. However, the first creation story tells us something essential to who we are: that we are created “in God’s likeness” or “in God’s image” (Genesis 1:26-27). Further, Genesis 1:28 tells us to subdue the earth and have dominion over it. If Genesis 1:26-27 tells us who we are, Genesis 1:28 tells us what to do. Yet we must root both our identity and our actions in the relationship from which we came – that is, in relationship with God.

Written by:

Rev. Wendolyn Trozzo, coordinator for congregational outreach at the Lutheran Study Centre at STS.



Bible Text: Genesis 1:24-31 (the 6th day of creation)

Scripture reflection:

The story of creation from Genesis 1 has this matching structure:

Day 1: Light	⇒	Day 4: Sun, moon, stars
Day 2: Waters/Sky	⇒	Day 5: Fish, birds
Day 3: Dry land, vegetation	⇒	Day 6: land animals, people, vegetation for food
Day 7: Sabbath		

In this Preaching Newsletter, we will focus on Day 6, when people were formed, made in God’s likeness, and called good. Yet Day 6 was not only about people, but included other creatures. Humans do not even get their own day in the creation story! This is our first sign that creation is not just a toy or an object for people to try to control. This teaches us that creation is about relationship with the Triune God and relationship with others in the world. Day six is full of wonders of nature - proving that the story is not about us. It is always a story of relationship with God and with the world around us.



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<https://pathways2preaching.wordpress.com/> LSC@STSabah.org P.O. Box 11925, 88821 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah 088 231579

Created in God's Likeness

Law + Gospel = Transformation

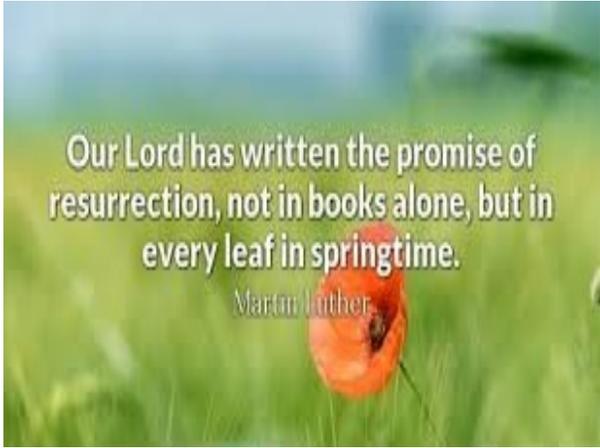
Law: The creation story is foundational to our understandings of who God is, as Creator, and who we are, as creatures. People have always wondered, how are we special? How are we different from animals? Many times, people answer these questions by claiming power for themselves, at the expense of others. They say, 'God gave me dominion, which means power. So, I will tear down the forests, fill the oceans with plastic, enslave other people, hurt my family members, and consume whatever I want.' Is this the kind of dominion that God's law decrees?

- In Genesis 1:16, it says the sun "rules" the day. Thus, ruling is a metaphor, in the same way we might say Mount Kinabalu "rules" or "dominates" the landscape. Further, when humans are given dominion over the animals (1:28), it is partnered with humans as vegetarians (1:29). Dominion does not include taking the life of an animal, and certainly does not include destroying entire habitats and ecosystems. Being created in the image of God and being given dominion mean that humans are unique in their ability to understand and serve God, but this domination does not mean exploiting any part of creation.
- What about man dominating woman? As humans, we love to divide and compare, to break ourselves into groups, and then to compare who has the most power. Historically men have held more power, though there are tribes that are matriarchal, ruled by women. But as we are all created in God's likeness, then every gender, race, ethnicity, and even creed and level of ability, all share equally in God's image. Dominion means being able to serve; it does not mean taking power for one group of people.
- We have created a world of scarcity, where we are afraid because we do not have "enough" of the things we desire: this is the root of our desire to negatively dominate. We think we are not near enough to God in wisdom, power, or glory; we think there is not enough food, or land, or resources (medicine, palm oil, belia trees). Because we are afraid, we use resources only for ourselves, being inefficient and greedy. In Genesis 2, people eat the forbidden fruit because they hear there is something they cannot have (being fully like God, not only in God's likeness). They want it all for themselves. This is not who God created us to be.

The Law in this text is the bad news that we as humans have misunderstood God's command for us to rule over the earth. This has incredibly destructive consequences spiritually, environmentally, and in our relationships. The Law here shows us our sin, both individually and as communities. God did not create us to be so sinful, fearful, and selfish.

Gospel:

Who **did** God create us to be? In Genesis, we are told that humans are to be God's representatives, or stewards, on earth. To fill this role, God gives us gifts that reflect God's identity. God makes humans creative, reasonable, social, equal (though with different roles), able to share power with God (co-creators), able to multiply and thereby bless others, nurturing, care-givers; God gives freedom but God also gives restraint. Power, strength, and potentiality (an open future) are the blessings God gives in creating humans in God's likeness. Because we are created in God's likeness, we already have what we need to fulfil our role. *continue page 7...*



Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime.

Martin Luther



Created in God's Likeness

Gospel: continue from page 6... The creation account as primary in Scripture comes before the birth of Israel as one specific people. Thus God envelops all of humanity in roles of co-creator and steward. God is the God of all people, and able to act in anyone's life. Later we see divisions between peoples, but first we are created together and later Jesus will gather us up (neither Jew nor Greek). Creation theology says that because of our roots as created beings, our past can be redeemed and our future open to new life. Further, not only Israel can be redeemed. All humanity, and even all creation, can be saved by God.

Note that because male and female share equally in God's likeness, it is as appropriate to call God "she" as it is "he." This is often a stumbling block for religious people, particularly because the Bible followed society in referring to God as male. A solution is that, for those who prefer to say "he," simply use "God," the name that contains all the names, images, and metaphors for God. It takes discipline to teach congregations that God is more than "he," but it is honest to the message given in Genesis when God showed people both God's identity and who humans should be, creating them both male and female.

Transformation:

Can we be transformed into perfect ecological vegetarians who respect all people equally, seeing God's likeness in every person, and caring wonderfully for creation? No, this side of heaven, we will still sin and fall short (Romans 3:23). At the other extreme, perhaps we will be trapped in the "Imago Dei" as advertised at Imago Mall – "Whatever your heart craves." In other words, we would be bound purely by sin, with a philosophy of living like this: "consume, don't create; stuff will make you happier than loving relationships; your clothes make your image more than your soul does." Both of these are bad news, as we cannot be perfect, nor are we completely entrapped in sin.

God finished the 6th day of creation by saying, "It is good." Later, God sent Jesus to offer us a new life, of repentance and goodness. Jesus promised us that the Holy Spirit would be with us, again and again calling and encouraging us to be the good stewards we were meant to be. Being made in God's likeness means that the earthly and the divine are not entirely separate; there are overlapping powers, roles, and responsibilities to which the Holy Spirit draws human beings and for which the Holy Spirit empowers us. It is as though the Spirit keeps reminding us who we are (created in God's likeness), and whose we are (beloved by our Creator). The Spirit helps us see who we can be today: forgivers and healers, environmentalists, peace-makers, co-creators, agents of God. We need to be transformed every day, because every day we choose fear and scarcity; but in creation God made abundance and enough for all. May we daily co-create in love and hope, partnering with God in whose likeness we were made.

Theological Reflection: When God says, "Let us make..." who is the "us"? We find that even before people are created, God is already in relationship. This is a key to our understanding of God the Trinity and God who creates us to be in relationship with God, one another, and creation. Scripture tells us that the Spirit moves over waters before the first day, so God's Spirit is an interwoven part of all creation. We as humans are not more important than the rest of creation; what makes us different is that God equips us to understand and steward creation. *Continue page 8...*



Created in God's Likeness

Theological Reflection: Continue from page 7... **Some people want to think of humanity as having two aspects: body and soul. In fact, we have three aspects: body, soul, and sociality. You cannot remove any of the three. We are not complete without our relationships to God, one another, and the whole creation. In this we are a reflection of the Trinitarian God. God is fully comprehended only when we recognize the relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as central to God's nature. In the same way we are in God's image in our relationships of mutuality, not in having dominating power over others.**

For Augustine, dominion is always in context of peace with nature, so dominion is achieved by seeing God's presence in all things. Meanwhile Irenaeus points out that the crown of creation is the 7th day, when God rests, and **not** the 6th. Humanity is not the crown of creation! The crown is Sabbath, when all things are at rest and peace in God. The goal of creation is not building, multiplying, controlling and consuming. No, the goal of creation is relationships that honour God and each other, including honoring creation.

What theologians and writers say:

“You can safely assume you’ve created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.”

Anne Lamott

People often use the phrase “like father, like son” to refer to family resemblance. When people see my likeness in my kids, it pleases me. God wants his children to bear his image and likeness, too. The Bible says we “must put on the new self, which is created in God's likeness and reveals itself in the true life that is upright and holy.” (Ephesians 4:24 TEV)

Pastor Rick Warren

“ As we exercise dominion over the created world, we do it knowing that we mirror God. We are not the originals but the images, and our duty is to use the original—God—as our pattern, not ourselves. Our work is meant to serve God's purposes more than our own, which prevents us from domineering all that God has put under our control. Think about the implications of this in our workplaces. How would God go about doing our job? What values would God bring to it? What products would God make? Which people would God serve? What organizations would God build? What standards would God use? In what ways, as image-bearers of God, should our work display the God we represent? When we finish a job, are the results such that we can say, “Thank you, God, for using me to accomplish this?”

<https://www.theologyofwork.org/old-testament/genesis-1-11-and-work>

Related verses:

Romans 8:29, Psalm 8, Proverbs 22:2, Proverbs 17:5, James 3:8-9

Songs and Hymns:

- #22 Our True God created all
- #33 To God with gladness sing

Prayer: God of all creation, we thank you for the beauty and wonder all around us. We thank you that you have made us in your image. Teach us who You are, so that we can reflect your image to others. Help us to understand the needs of creation and of other people, so that we can love and serve them in your name. Redeem us from our sin and daily show us your grace and mercy. We ask this in the name of the Jesus. Amen.