

And Must This Body Die?

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

And must this body die,
This well-wrought frame decay?
And must these active limbs of mine
Lie mould'ring in the clay?

Corruption, earth, and worms
Shall but refine this flesh,
'Till my triumphant spirit comes
To put it on afresh.

God my Redeemer lives,
And often from the skies
Looks down, and watches all my dust,
Till he shall bid it rise.

Array'd in glorious grace
Shall these vile bodies shine,
And ev'ry shape, and ev'ry face
Be heavenly and divine.

These lively hopes we owe,
Lord, to thy dying love;
O may we bless thy grace below,
And sing thy grace above.

Saviour, accept the praise
Of these our humble songs,
Till tunes of nobler sounds we raise
With our immortal tongues.

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Body, Soul, and Spirit, Part 4: The Body

Kevin T. Bauder

God planned to create the human race in His own image (Gen 1:26). He accomplished His plan in two steps. First, He fashioned the first human from the dust of the ground (Gen 2:7). Second, He breathed the breath of life into that first man. This inbreathing resulted in the man becoming a living soul.

The text does not say that God fashioned the man's body from the dust of the ground. According to Genesis, what God formed was not merely a body, but a man—a human being. The man did not become a human when God breathed into him. He was already a human being before God's breath made him a living soul.

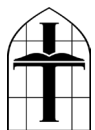
In other words, human identity is tied to the body. We should not say that the body is human, as if humanity were merely a quality or property that the body possesses. The body is not just human; rather, each body is *a* human, a human being, a human person. Human identity and human nature are tied directly to the body.

This biblical understanding of the body directly contradicts the ancient Greek vision of human nature. The Greeks thought that the soul is the real person, immaterial and immortal. The soul only lives temporarily in the body. When the body dies, the soul is freed for its immortal existence.

One form of this Greek vision, Gnosticism, was particularly vicious. In the gnostic vision, spirit is good and matter is evil. Specifically, the human body is evil. Most versions of Gnosticism teach contempt for the body. They emphasize that bodily appetites are corrupt and must be resisted. People who suppress bodily desires may eventually free their real selves (their spirits) from the body.

The Bible rejects these theories. According to the Bible, your body is as much you as your soul or spirit is. Your soul or spirit is your inner person. Your body is your outer person. Both are you, and you are not fully you without both.

To be sure, the outer person can be separated from the inner person. When that happens, the outer person dies (James 2:26). Even when your body dies, however, it is still you. When God instituted the curse of human death,



In the Nick of Time is published by Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

Permission is granted to duplicate for personal and church use.

www.centalseminary.edu | info@centralseminary.edu
900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

He made this clear. God did not say that Adam's body would die. He told Adam that *he* would return to the ground, "since you were taken from it. For you are dust, and you will return to dust" (Gen 3:19, CSB). These words could not be spoken about a soul. They are statements about a person, but the body is clearly in view. Only the body is made of dust and returns to dust. The necessary conclusion is that the body is the person.

Personal identity remains tied to the body even after the body has been entombed and has decayed. Peter remarks about David that, "He is dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day" (Acts 2:29, CSB). According to Peter, when the body of David was buried, David himself was buried.

The Bible uses this language regularly. Abraham buried Sarah (Gen 23:19). Isaac and Ishmael buried Abraham (Gen 25:9). Rachel was buried on the way to Ephrath (Gen 35:19). Esau and Jacob buried Isaac (Gen 35:29). Jacob's sons buried him (Gen 50:13). Miriam was buried at Kadesh (Num 20:1). Aaron was buried at Mosera (Deut 10:6).

This list could be extended, but one more instance is particularly striking. After Jesus died on the cross, Joseph of Arimathea approached Pilate to ask for Jesus' body (John 19:38). With Pilate's permission, he took the body of Jesus away. He and Nicodemus oversaw the embalming of the body with spices and linen cloth (19:39–40). All these verses talk about the *body* of Jesus. When the text narrates the burial in the tomb, however, it says that, "There they laid Jesus" (19:42). They did not just bury Jesus' body. They buried *Him*.

The bodies of the dead are still bound to their identity. A deceased body is still the same person it was when alive. That is the reason we must not treat dead bodies with contempt. Human embodiment is part of being created in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27). To treat a corpse brutally is an act of desecration.

Of course, the inner person survives the death of the outer person. When Jesus was laid in the tomb, His inner person was in paradise (Luke 23:43). When believers die, their inner person is absent from the body but present with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8). Even so, something is missing in this kind of disembodied existence. We are at home in the body (2 Cor 5:6). When we are out of the body, we are naked and unclothed (5:3–4). Even though we are present with the Lord, we are literally not all there. A vital element of our personhood, a significant aspect of our identity, is missing.

This missing element is restored only in the resurrection. The resurrection of the body is not a footnote to the Christian faith. It is the heart of biblical hope. We long to be clothed in the resurrection body (2 Cor 5:2, 4). It will have gloriously different qualities from our present body, but it will be numerically identical to the body we now are (1 Cor 15:35–44). When our bodies are redeemed by the resurrection, we shall be revealed as the sons of

God (Rom 8:19). This will be the moment when our adoption as God's sons becomes complete (8:23).

The body is not incidental. It is not an afterthought. It is not a temporary home for the real us. It is as much the real us as our soul or spirit. It is our outer person, corresponding to an immaterial inner person. It is inseparable from our identity and selfhood. Our body is us.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
