

Eternal Life is Ours

All our sins have been forgiven! Ponder that for a moment! They have been washed away in the blood of the Lamb, washing which we enjoy day after day in this life and which we shall enjoy fully and perfectly in heaven (Revelation 7:9-17). While we mourn in repentance our whole life long over our sins and failures to perfectly reflect our faith, at the last judgment all such mourning will end. For there will be no more sins and no more temptations to sin in heaven but only perfect joy over the redemption won for us by Christ and received by us here in faith.

What a day that will be for us! Just think of it: All that has been suffered silently and without any comfort save that of the Gospel itself will be exposed to the light for praise from the Saviour. All that was done without the slightest hint of gratitude in this life will hear the praise of God before the whole world. All that was done simply because it was in accord with God's Word but that at the time seemed so pointless and in vain, all of it will receive from Him for whom it was done the highest acclamation. Oh to be sure, none of these things were ever done perfectly or even with a perfect motive, but at the last judgment that won't matter. The work will be held up as a perfect jewel, a diamond, and a sapphire, fit only for the praises of the Lamb who sits on the throne.

That's what St. Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians 15, his great resurrection chapter. To mention just the point most pertinent here, the apostle speaks of the difference between our bodies now and our bodies at the resurrection and in heaven. He says, "*It will be like that with the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in decay: it is raised without decay.*"⁴³ *It is sown in dishonour: it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness: it is raised in power.*⁴⁴ *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 trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.*⁵³ *For this perishable body must clothe itself with what is imperishable, and this dying body must clothe itself with what cannot die.*⁵⁴ *When this perishable body clothes itself with what is imperishable and when this dying body clothes itself with what cannot die, then this passage of Scripture will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory!"* (15:42-44, 52-54)

So then, at the resurrection on the Last Day all that is wrong with our bodies and, yes, with our souls too will disappear. To put it another way, the body and soul will together forever be set free from the sinful nature that infected them from the moment of conception (original sin) and that showed that corruption throughout earthly life with sins of thought, word, and deed (actual sin). All that is wrong with us as a result of sin, including mortality, will disappear on the Last Day - the sin forgiven, and its consequences forever destroyed. That's the difference between a "natural body" and a "spiritual body" in the resurrection: still a body, but minus its sins and limitations.

When will all of this happen? When will the Last Day finally come? We certainly reject all the foolish attempts that have been made to pinpoint an actual date for Jesus' return. Jesus Himself warns against such folly and does so emphatically when He declares that even He (in the state of humiliation of His human nature) does not choose to know the exact date (Mark 13:32). It isn't difficult to conceive of reasons why God does not choose to tell us the exact date of Jesus' return. If He did, we can well imagine that people would put off repentance until that day promised - by which time, of course, the Gospel would have disappeared together with any faith in it. It is for the same reason that He does not reveal to us the day of our death: we simply are too perverse in our nature to handle that knowledge with wisdom!

So instead of telling us the hour of our death or the date of the Last Day, He tells us instead always to be ready, to watch for His coming. He urges that repeatedly in almost every instance when He speaks of the Last Day (e.g., Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 12:40; 21:36). The apostles make the same plea: Watch (e.g., 1 Corinthians 15:52). St. Peter (2 Peter 3) is especially graphic in his call to us to watch and be prepared always for that day. For it will come so swiftly ("like a thief," i.e., without an announcement or warning) that there will then be no time to prepare, to repent, or to perform good works as fruits of faith. In an instant all that we know of time and space, of landscapes and geography will disappear and be destroyed or transformed.