

“When We All Get to the New Creation”

Adjusting Our Vocabulary about Life after Death

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When I first started on my journey as a believer, I had a misconception about life after death. I thought that my soul would leave my body and go to live with Jesus in heaven forever.

You may be thinking: “That’s a misconception? That’s what *I* believe!” Well, there are certainly elements of what I thought that are true. It is true, for example, that we go to be with Jesus immediately after dying. This is mentioned on a few occasions in the New Testament, but with very little explanation. While it is a comforting and wonderful reality, we simply don’t know much about it.



The problem comes when we think that this disembodied life in heaven is somehow our ultimate and eternal hope. Many of us grew up singing hymns that reinforce this idea. Notice how the author of “I’ll Fly Away” imagines that his body is like a prison that his soul will someday fly away from to live in an eternal, spiritual “land” away from earth.

When the shadows of this life have gone,
I’ll fly away;
Like a bird from prison bars has flown,
I’ll fly away (I’ll fly away)

Just a few more weary days and then,
I’ll fly away;
To a land where joy shall never end,
I’ll fly away (I’ll fly away)

For whatever reason, many Christians have developed the idea that “flying” away from this world and from the body is somehow the ideal, that it will usher us into an eternal existence. Scripture, however, makes it very clear that this just isn’t true.

What is the biblical vision, then? The New testament writers confront us with something even more exciting! It’s what they call the resurrection—that is,

the reality that when Jesus returns, believers will be brought back to life in their bodies. Most people recognize 1 Corinthians 15 as a chapter about Jesus’ resurrection, but many fail to realize that it is mostly about *our* resurrection. Listen in as Paul explains a mystery in 1 Corinthians 15:50-53:

“Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”

We nod our heads at this point. We know that it wouldn’t work for us to enter God’s future kingdom with our decaying bodies. We, and the hymn-writers of the last century, have always agreed with this point. That’s why just our souls go to heaven, right? Not at all. For Paul, the solution is not to get rid of our bodies, but to transform them.

“Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep [remain dead], but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”

We will not inherit God’s future kingdom as immaterial souls. Rather, God will raise us and transform us, inside and out. After all, every part of God’s creation is good, the non-physical *and* the physical. Fallen, yes, but worthy of being redeemed. That’s why Paul’s hope was not “to be unclothed, but to be clothed” (2 Cor 5:4). The Bible teaches that one day we will rise to live in a remade world—a “new heavens and a new earth” as Peter calls it (2 Peter 3:13)—a physical existence that is newly animated by God’s own spirit.

This is a wonderful hope and it ought to be reflected in the way we talk. Somehow, though not entirely incorrect, phrases like “when we get to heaven” have become the focus of our speech. “Going to heaven” has become the way we talk about the believer’s ultimate reward. But there’s so much more! Instead, let’s use phrases that celebrate the resurrection—things like “when we get to the new creation,” or “I’m not afraid of death because one day I will be raised.” This isn’t just a matter of semantics; it reveals our mindset. Let’s allow our hearts and mouths be filled with anticipation as we wait for God to transform us and the world we live in.