

## **Theological considerations:**

### 8. The biblical creational theology of the physical body:

Gen. 2:7 then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

- a. The human being is a "duplexity" — a unity of two "aspects" — a *material* aspect (the physical body, the "outer man") and an *immaterial* aspect (the soul/spirit; the "inner man" or "the hidden person of the heart," 1 Pet. 3:4).

There are two entities in man's constitution, diverse in nature and origin, the one derived from the earth, material, corporeal, phenomenal, divisible, the other derived from a distinct action of God, immaterial and ordinarily not phenomenal, indivisible and indestructible. These two entities form one organic unit without disharmony or conflict. In the integral person they are interdependent. They coact and interact. (John Murray, "The Nature of Man")

- b. The body is "very good" (Gen. 1:31) — in contrast to much pagan thought where the physical is considered "evil," in contrast to the "soul" or "spirit" which is good (e.g., the body is the "prison-house of the soul" and immortality is viewed as solely immaterial). If the physical body is evil (or, at best, insignificant), then "purifying" the soul by burning-away the physical body makes perfect sense. This is the (stated or tacit) rationale for cremation in the minds of many practitioners. Note, the Bible does sometimes speak of a refining fire (e.g., Mal. 3:2-3; cf. Isa. 4:4), but it is *sin* that is burned-away as a pollutant, not physicality.
- c. Physical death brings an "unnatural" — and *temporary* — separation between "soul" and body, with the "soul" continuing to exist beyond physical death (2 Cor. 5:1-9; cf. 1 Cor. 15:51-54).

WSC. 37. *What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?*

A. The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.

- d. As the bodies of believers are united to Christ in this life, so also in death.

1 Cor. 6:13 "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. 15 Do you not know that *your bodies are members of Christ*? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!... 19 Or do you not know that *your body* is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God *in your body*.

Even in death the body that is laid in the tomb is not simply a body. It is the body of the person. More properly, it is the person as respects the body. It is the person who is buried or laid in the tomb.... So what is laid in the grave is still integral to the person who died. In and during death the person is identified with the dissolved material entity. (John Murray, "The Nature of Man")

- e. Though it is easy to construe the death of anyone as a kind of repose, it is specifically with respect to the death of believers that the Scripture uses the language of "falling asleep."

1 Thess. 4:13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about *those who are asleep*, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who *have fallen asleep*. (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20 below)

Acts 7:59 And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."  
60 And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin  
against them." And when he had said this, *he fell asleep.*

Rev. 14:13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who  
die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may *rest from  
their labors, for their deeds follow them!*" (cf. Matt. 27:52)

And such a "sleeping" implies an "awakening" — bodily resurrection!

9. The biblical theology of the bodily resurrection:

- a. Jesus is the *first* of a new kind of "resurrection" (Col. 1:18; 1 Cor. 15:20,22) — not  
returning to the present experience of life, but "going through and coming out on the  
other side" into a glorious new "*transphysicality*" (N.T. Wright's term to describe the  
"transformed physicality of the resurrection bodies of Jesus and of believers).

Col. 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, *the firstborn  
from the dead*, that in everything he might be preeminent. (cf. Rev. 1:5)

1 Cor. 15:20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, *the firstfruits of those who  
have fallen asleep.* 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resur-  
rection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.  
23 But each in his own order: Christ the *firstfruits*, then at his coming those who belong to  
Christ.

Jesus' resurrection body has properties that are both like and unlike our present  
experience (e.g., Luke 24:36–43 and John 20:26 below)

- b. Our Lord emphasizes the continuity between his body that died and his body that is  
now alive again and presented to the disciples, not simply to prove that he was truly  
*alive*, but that it was *he himself* who was alive.

Luke 24:36 As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and  
said to them, "Peace to you!" 37 But they were startled and frightened and thought they  
saw a spirit. 38 And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in  
your hearts? 39 See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a  
spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." 40 And when he had said  
this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41 And while they still disbelieved for joy  
and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" 42 They gave  
him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate before them.

John 20:20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the dis-  
ciples were glad when they saw the Lord...

24 Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus  
came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them,  
"Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the  
nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them.  
Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be  
with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put  
out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." 28 Thomas an-  
swered him, "My Lord and my God!"

- c. The NT uses the prototypical experience of Jesus' resurrection as the pattern to ex-  
plain (though not in much detail) the resurrection of believers.

Phil. 3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus  
Christ, 21 who will *transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body*, by the power that  
enables him even to subject all things to himself.

1 Cor. 15:35 But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they  
come?"...

42 So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. 43 It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. 44 It is sown a natural [*psychikon*] body; it is raised a spiritual [*pneumatikon*] body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 45 Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. 47 The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. 48 As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. 49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, *we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.*

11. The pagan (or materialist) theological presuppositions of the practice of cremation:

For example, non-Christian religions of Indian origin (like Hinduism) believe that fire resolves the body into its basic elements of fire, water, earth and air, and at the same time purifies the spirit in preparation for its reincarnation. Monistic (pantheistic) systems assume that the body is a part of the larger "One," and cremation is a way of quickly reuniting it with the earth. Naturalistic atheism assumes that there is nothing beyond death so cremation is chosen as the most environmentally responsible way to dispose of "the remains."

12. *Theological conclusion:* The conjunction of these two theological emphases — the necessity and goodness of our physical, bodily existence in the creational purpose of God for humankind *which is confirmed by God's intention to raise his people to a glorious new embodied existence as the final stage of their "conformity to the image of his Son"* — throw into sharp relief the inappropriateness of elective incineration of the body of believers.

Rom. 8:29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be *conformed to the image of his Son*, in order that he might be the *firstborn* among many brothers.