

EVERY PERSON WILL RECEIVE A NEW BODY DURING THE SECOND COMING

—by St. Epifanios, Bishop of Cyprus—

God, the Creator of all things, ordered and arranged all things superbly, just like a large city. He embellished everything by the word of His commandment. He composed each object from the appropriate elements and made each animal distinctly different, so that the universe may become perfectly replete with beauty through the existence of a vast array of living organisms. God filled the heavens with stars, the air with birds, the earth with animals, and the oceans with fish. Lastly, He created man, after He prepared everything for him like a spectacular home, and He ushered man, this likeness and replica of His own image, into the world, as if placing an exquisite statue, which He just finished constructing with His own hands, into a resplendent temple.

God certainly knew that whatever He would fashion with His own hands would necessarily be immortal, since it would be the work of Immortality. Immortality creates immortal things, just as evil generates evil things, and injustice gives rise to unjust things. It is not an act of righteousness to be unrighteous; this is an act of unrighteousness. Similarly, it is not an act of injustice to carry out justice; this is an act of justice. Incorruption does not produce corruption—corruption does. Likewise, corruption does not produce immortality—immortality does. In brief, as with the above examples, everything that is created is necessarily similar to its creator. God is immortality, and life, and incorruption. Man has been created by God. Everything that is created by immortality is immortal; hence, man is immortal. This is exactly why God Himself fashioned man. In contrast, He merely commanded that all the other species of animals be brought forth from the air, the earth, and the water. “Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creatures that have life, and fowl that may fly above the earth” (Gen. 1:20), He said. And, “Let the earth bring forth the living creature after its kind” (Gen. 1:24). However, when it came to man, God no longer said “Let the earth bring forth,” or “Let the waters bring forth,” but, “Let Us make man in Our image and likeness” (Gen. 1:26). And “God took the dust of the ground and formed man, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Gen. 2:7).

By definition, a true human being consists of both a soul and a body united in one harmonious person. Because neither the soul without a body nor the body without a soul can be called a human being.

"God created man in his own image; in the image of God He created him" (Gen. 1:27). Thus He showed concern for His own statue, desiring for it to remain forever and not be easily destroyed or corrupted. Something similar takes place with artists who create statues. Such craftsmen not only pay close attention to ensure that they create statues that are beautiful, appealing, exquisite, and impressive, but they also, as much as they possibly can, seek to transmit immortality to their works of art, and desire to preserve them unchanged throughout time. This is what Phideas did with the idol of Zeus at Olympia. As soon as he completed the figure (which he sculpted from ivory), he ordered that oil be poured around both legs of the statue, in order to preserve it ageless in perpetuity, as much as possible.

If artists and sculptors desire for the works they produce to endure forever, wouldn't God, Who creates magnificent works of art, Who is capable of all things and Who creates things out of nothing, wouldn't He want much more for man, His rational statue, to remain indestructible and immortal? Would He have allowed man, whom He created with His own hands and shaped in His own image and likeness, who is the adornment of the world and for whom the world was created, to decompose in such a lamentable manner and be handed over to demise and corruption? Not at all!

God created man to be incorrupt and rendered Him an image of His own eternal character. For as the Wisdom of Solomon attests, **"God did not make death; neither hath He pleasure in the destruction of the living" (WSol. 1:13).** Rather, **"Through the envy of the devil came death into the world" (WSol. 2:24).**

Death was then found as a means of correction and rectification. Man became utterly defiled and marred when he rejected God's commandment, and he developed many evil blemishes, which the devil and father of deception conceived in order to have man ceaselessly think of and be inclined toward unrighteousness. Seeing that an eternal evil had arisen through the ploy of the deceiver, God cloaked man with death, so that, through the decomposition of the body, all the evil that had taken root within it could die and disappear. For death is nothing other than the separation of the soul from the body.

God did not exile man from Paradise because He did not want him to eat and reap life from the tree (for man would have lived forever as soon as he ate from the tree of life), but so that evil would not become eternal.

Because if God wanted man to die once and for all without tasting life, why did He send Christ to the earth from the heavens? To contend that God did this because He regretted [sentencing man to death], is a feeble argument. God is neither oblivious of the future nor malicious; on the contrary, He is perfectly good, and He knows everything that will take place in the future. Therefore, He did not exile man from Paradise in order to prevent him from eating from the tree of life and impede him from remaining alive forever, but in order to first mortify sin through death [of the body], and subsequently, after the death of man and the dissolution of sin, for man to be resurrected pure and immaculate, and thus partake of life.

To assert that the body is unable to receive immortality is absurd and blasphemy. Why was Adam exiled (after being cloaked with coats of skins (Gen. 3:21)) and impeded from eating from the tree of life if it was impossible for man to live eternally with his body? He was impeded precisely because it was possible for him not to die had he tasted from this tree: "And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of Us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever. Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So He drove out Adam (Gen. 3:22-24). Hence, it was possible for man to live had he not been prevented from tasting of immortality. He was prevented, however, in order for sin to perish as it was sentenced to death along with the body, and so that the body could be resurrected once sin had been destroyed. God decided to cloak man with death so that man would not become an eternal evil, as we have already stated, having within himself sin as a reigning and everlasting entity; for sin would have taken root in an immortal body and would have had a source of everlasting nourishment. Thus, the purpose of the coats of skins was for sin to be utterly destroyed, through the decomposition of the body, so that not even a small rootlet would be left behind from which new shoots of sin would be able to emerge again.

Oftentimes, certain fig trees growing next to beautifully constructed temples have extended their roots like a network through the joints in the walls and displaced the stones from their proper positions. The damage resulting from this proliferating tree will not cease until it is thoroughly uprooted, at which time the branches that have grown into the structure will also wither. Afterwards, once the fig tree's branches have been removed, it is possible to reposition the stones in their original and correct location. Thus, the temple will be restored without any remnants of the damage it had previously sustained, while the fig tree will die after it has been

completely uprooted. Similarly, God, Who engineered and built His own temple (i.e., man) cut down and eradicated sin, which had sprouted like a wild fig tree, through the use of a temporary means, namely death, in order for the body to be resurrected immortal and unblemished once sin has withered, perished, and completely vanished.

Before the body dies, and for as long as it lives, sin co-exists, concealing within it its roots, even though it is cut back and pruned externally with self-control and the word of God. Otherwise, if sin were completely and truly removed from us after baptism, we would never commit any wrongdoing again. However, even after believing in Christ and receiving the bath of purification, we often find ourselves sinning. Thus, no one can boast that he is without sin, or that he has never even thought of something unrighteous. Hence, at present it is possible to control and subdue sin through faith so that harmful fruits do not grow; nevertheless, it is not possible to totally pull up the roots. At present we control the shoots of sin (i.e., the evil thoughts) by cutting them as if with an axe, so that no root of bitterness springs up and plagues us (Heb. 12:15); after the body is resurrected, the ability to even think of something evil will disappear.

The Apostle Paul, realizing that the root of sin has not yet been removed from man, states the following: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I want to do, I do not do; but the evil that I do not want to do, that I do. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wants to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members (Rom. 7:18-22). Hence, sin has not yet been eradicated; it has not yet altogether died, but it still lives. How would it have been possible for sin to have been completely destroyed and abolished if man had not first been cloaked with death, thus allowing sin, like a plant, to wither away with the body, wherein it hid its roots, and enabling man to be resurrected once more no longer having any embedded roots of bitterness? Death was used by God, our defender and true physician, as an antidote to uproot and abolish sin, so that evil would not eternally dwell within us (since it would have sprouted in an immortal body), and so that we would not remain crippled and alienated from virtue (since we would forever carry the terrible sickness of sin within everlasting and immortal bodies). For this reason, God very ingeniously used death as

a medicinal means of purification, in order to save both the soul and the body, so that we may thus be rendered immaculate and flawless.

It is similar to a craftsman who decides to melt down an exceptionally beautiful and perfectly symmetric gold statue that he constructed, after suddenly witnessing that it has been vandalized by a certain malicious and envious man who could not stand to see the statue's splendor, and who consequently damaged it in order to satisfy his jealousy and derive empty pleasure. If the craftsman wants to restore his work to its initial beauty and perfection, it is necessary for it to be dismantled and melted down again, so that all the deformities and mutilations that resulted from the assaults of jealousy can be obliterated, while the statue is recreated again to the exact same shape and form, free of imperfections and damage. The craftsman does not intend to destroy the statue, even though it is melted to its elemental form; rather, the intention is to restore it and eliminate the scars.

It seems to me that our God decided to do the same thing with us. For when He saw that His most-noble and splendid sculpture, man, had been severely injured by the malicious assaults and envy [of the devil], He, as a compassionate Being, could not bear to abandon man in this state, eternally blemished with an everlasting flaw; rather, He proceeded to break down the human body into its elemental constituents. Thus, in the first case a statue is melted down; in the second case, the body dies and decomposes. The purpose of the former is to reshape and renew a precious metal; the purpose of the latter is to resurrect [the body]. This is what the prophet Jeremiah affirms as well with the following words: **"Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he was forming something of wet clay upon the stones. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter. So he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter?' says the Lord. 'Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hands'" (Jer. 18:3-6).**

Pay close attention to how the mighty hand of the Lord did not wish to abandon man, His own work, in deception after suffering unjustly from the evil-doer. On the contrary, He softened and wet the clay just as a potter remolds clay in order to remove through this reworking all the blemishes and cracks and make it entirely new, flawless, and pleasing. **"Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?" (Rom. 9:21).** It seems

to me that the Apostle is saying: Doesn't God have the power to use the same matter to reconstruct and to rejuvenate every person, so that they are resurrected either unto honor and glory, or dishonor and condemnation? Unto dishonor for them who lived in sin; unto honor for them who lived with righteousness, just as it was revealed to the Prophet Daniel: **"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament" (Dan. 12:2-3).**

How is death not beneficial, since it eradicates all the things that ravage our human nature? But so that we do not repeat the same things over and over again, let us confirm this by examining the Ode in the book of Deuteronomy.

When God says, **"I will kill, and I will make alive; I will wound and I will also heal. And there is no one who will deliver out of My hands" (Dt. 32:39)**, what else is He trying to teach us other than that the body is first killed and dies precisely for this reason: so that it may again be resurrected and live? It is first struck and shattered so that it may again be recreated healthy and whole. And there is nothing at all that can deliver and snatch [man] from the great and mighty hand of the Lord, in order to destroy and eliminate him: not fire, not death, not darkness, not chaos, not even corruption.

God did not adorn the entire creation in vain, but in order for it to remain forever, just as the book of Wisdom attests: **"For He created all things that they might exist, and the generations of the world so they might be preserved, and there is no poison of death in them" (WSol. 1:14)**. The Apostle Paul clearly affirms the same when he states, **"The earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:19-21)**.

Hence, the creation joyfully awaits to be restored to a better and more beautiful state, and it rejoices as it looks forward to the resurrection of God's children, with whom it **"groans and labors with birth pangs together until now" (Rom. 8:22)**. It does so in expectation of our deliverance (and the deliverance of even the body itself) from corruption, when we will cast away the mortality of the flesh as we are resurrected, according to the scriptural verse: **"Shake off the dust and rise up. Sit down, O Jerusalem" (Isa. 52:2)**. And as the Apostle confirms: **"Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we**

ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23).

Why then did God not make man an angel, if He desired man to become an angel instead of a human being? Was He perhaps unable to do so? To make such a claim is blasphemy. Did He perhaps put off making something better in order to create something worse first. This is also implausible. God does not err when it comes to creating what is good, nor does He postpone, nor is He incapable. Rather, He has the power of doing what He wants when He wants. And so, He created man in the beginning, desiring for him to be and to remain a human being. If God desired this, and if He desires what is good, then, it follows, that man is good; and man is comprised of both a soul and a body. Hence, man is not bodiless, but he has a body, so that he does not turn into something other than a human being. It is necessary for God to preserve all the immortal beings He created as they are. For, as the Wisdom of Solomon states, **“God created man for immortality and made him an image of His own eternity” (WSol. 2:23)**. Hence, the human body will not vanish; for man consists of a soul and a body.

Pay attention to how the Lord teaches this very same thing to the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection of the body. In order to discount the teaching of the resurrection of the body, **“the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection,”** states the Gospel, **“came to Him” (Mt. 22:23)**, and they posed a question to Christ concerning a certain lady who was supposedly married to seven brothers. If there will be no resurrection of the body, and if only man’s soul will be saved, then Christ would have agreed with them and admitted that their way of thinking was proper and correct. However, He responded thus: **“In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in Heaven” (Mt. 22:30)**. He said this not because people will not have a body, but because they will thereafter live in incorruption, no longer being married or given unto marriage. Just as the angels in Heaven, we also will dwell in Paradise no longer occupied with weddings, but with beholding God, and reaping life, as Christ presides over us. He did not say “they will become angels,” but “as angels”; that is, **“crowned with glory and honor; differing a little than the angels” (Ps. 8:6)**, and very close to being angels.

Therefore, it is most illogical to conclude that the bodies of the saints will not be resurrected because Christ states that they will appear as angles during the Resurrection. The word “resurrection” itself clearly indicates that this event will indeed occur. For, a resurrection takes place not when something has not fallen, but it occurs when something that has

fallen rises up again, just as when the prophet states, **“I shall raise up the fallen tabernacle of David” (Amos 9:11)**. What falls is that which dies, not that which does not die. The body dies; for the soul is immortal. If then the soul is immortal, whereas the body is what lies dead, they who believe in the resurrection but simultaneously maintain that man will be without a body in fact deny the resurrection. For not what is standing, but that which has fallen is raised up, according to the scriptural verse, **“Will not he who falls arise? Or he who turns away, will he not return?” (Jer. 8:4)**.