

Organ Donation

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“Should I be an organ donor? I feel as if I am not an organ donor, it’s almost selfish to deny my healthy organs to someone who needs them. In addition, if one of our church members needed a life-saving organ donation, we would not refuse it, would we? On the other hand, I feel as if I am an organ donor, it’s as if I am denying the bodily resurrection. I am saying that I don’t believe that my body will be reunited of the Day of Judgment. I feel as if my body needs to be whole on that day, and it won’t be whole if I am an organ donor.”

Like many ethical questions, the Bible does not give a direct answer: “Thou shalt be an organ donor” or “Thou shalt not be an organ donor.” Therefore, we must apply biblical principles.

If one of your family members or friends required a kidney, which you can donate while you are still alive (for you can live with only one), would you refuse him/her? You might even know of people who have received life-saving organs. If it were morally wrong to donate an organ, would it not be morally wrong also to receive an organ? Why should we receive the benefit of another person’s organs, but refuse to countenance the possibility of giving our own if they were needed? Organ donation, as well as blood donation, falls into the general category of doing good to one’s neighbor, even seeking to save the neighbor’s life. Medical technology has enabled us to do things unheard of in past generations. Medical ethics is a complicated subject, and it will only become more complicated as medicine develops. Do we love our neighbor enough to give him/her our blood, or our kidney, or, after our death, some other organ? That is one compelling argument.

Obviously, organ donation must be voluntary. Christians must condemn the “harvesting” of organs either from non-consenting adults or worse, from aborted (murdered) children, as well as from the black-market of the sale of organs from Third World countries, for example.

I can understand the reticence. If I give my kidney, liver, lungs, heart, corneas, etc. for organ donation, is my body not maimed in the resurrection? I think that is the wrong way to

think of the bodily resurrection. While the resurrection is a mystery, Paul does explain it in 1 Corinthians 15. Two facts stand out. My resurrection body will be the same body that Jesus redeemed. It will not be a brand-new body without any resemblance to this body. Nevertheless, it will be a glorified and spiritually transformed body, a body like Christ's (see Phil. 3:21).

Paul uses the illustration of a seed. When you sow a pinecone, for example, the pine tree that grows from the pinecone looks nothing like the original pinecone. Yet the pinecone is essentially the same as the pine tree. When you plant a pinecone, you do not expect a maple tree to grow from it. A pine tree is more glorious than a pinecone, but it is the same species, the tree being a development of the pinecone. Paul writes, "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:42–44). A spiritual body is not an immaterial, non-physical body, as if we will be floating ghosts. It means a body governed by and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and a body fit for the glory of the new creation.

We do not know to what extent we will have the same bodily organs in the resurrection. Will we need kidneys, which filter the blood, for example, in the resurrection? Will we need a heart to pump blood? Will we even have blood? Should we even speculate about such matters? The point that scripture makes is, whatever happens to our body after death (whether it is eaten by wild animals, or vaporized in a nuclear explosion, or lost in the depths of the sea), God will be able to resurrect it. God will even be able to resurrect it if we donate our organs to someone who needs them.

But does Jesus not speak about entering into heaven without eyes or limbs in Matthew 5:29–30? Jesus is not speaking literally there. He is simply underlining the seriousness of sin. So serious is sin that it would be (hypothetically) better to pluck our eye out or cut our hand off so that we enter maimed into heaven, rather than enter hell with one's body intact. If a Christian did (foolishly) cut off his hand, he would not actually get rid of sin. If a Christian did cut off his hand, he would no more enter the new creation maimed than a Christian would who lost a hand in a tragic accident. Our bodies will be glorified in the new creation. The blind will see. The deaf will hear. The lame will leap for joy. The organ donor will have no lack.

This is a sensitive issue. Each person must be persuaded in his/her own mind, and if you do plan to be an organ donor, you should discuss your wishes with your family so that they know what to do in the event of your death.

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