

Organ Donation and Transplantation

This pastoral letter sets forth theologically the biblical principles which should be applied to the questions we face as Christians and churches in evaluating and responding to the issue of organ donation and implantation.

A pastoral letter is intended to shine the light of God's word broadly on a general area of concern to the Church. Requiring the approval of only one General Assembly, it is not as definitive as a Position Paper, which requires the approval of two General Assemblies (including a minimum of one year circulation among the presbyteries). The primary purpose of a pastoral letter is to guide churches within the EPC rather than to identify our positions to the world. (Act of Assembly 97-13)

There is a concern within the Christian community about the propriety of donating and implanting organs. This issue is not explicitly addressed in the Bible, but an answer can be found that is based on scriptural principles by considering what is written and what is not written in the Bible.

Consider first what the Bible does say about our bodies. God made man from the dust of the ground, and God breathed life into him, and he became a living soul (*Gen. 2:7*). When man sinned by disobeying God, he immediately suffered spiritual death. With that, physical death became inevitable after which the body would return to the dust (*Gen. 2:17, 3:17-19*).

Scripture tells us that all men will be physically resurrected. The bodies of Christians will be changed into glorified bodies like that of Jesus, fit for service to God for eternity (*Phil. 3:21*). Unbelievers are raised to face judgment for their sins and be cast into hell to suffer everlasting punishment (*John 5:28-29, Acts 24:15*).

It is the custom of many to bury the dead, perhaps in anticipation of the resurrection. Scripture tells us that we will be raised in the same bodies as we now have, though gloriously changed (*1 Cor. 15:52, Phil. 3:20-21, WCF 32.2*). However, not all bodies are in graves. Some have been cremated, and some are lost at sea or elsewhere. Will they be raised just as the bodies that are in graves? Acts 24:15 says that the just and the unjust will be resurrected. Every member of the human race will be resurrected, regardless of the condition or location of their bodies.

Even though our earthly bodies suffer decay, we will have glorified bodies in eternity. Even if we should lose a limb due to accident or disease, we expect that our glorified bodies will be perfect. If we donate an organ while we are alive or at our death, we should not expect to go through eternity without that organ.

Now consider what the Bible does not say. The Bible does not teach us that our bodies have to be in any special state in order to be resurrected. The resurrection is a fact revealed by God to give us hope both for now and for eternity. But the resurrection will be God's doing, and we do not need to know how He will accomplish it. It is enough for us to know that it will be.

God has given man the intelligence and skill to accomplish the transplantation of an organ from one person to another to benefit the latter. It is an act of love to give an organ so that someone else might live or somehow experience an improvement in his life. There are many people who are suffering or dying because of a shortage of organ donors. Christians should be leading the way to show the world how to give. We have received the gift of eternal life. Jesus gave sacrificially and we should follow His example.

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