

Issues of Life Every Christian Faces: The Body

Last week I began this series of messages on the six issues of life that all Christians face. They are:

1. The mind: conformed or transformed?
2. The body: idol or temple?
3. Wealth: blessing or barrier to God?
4. Work: calling or curse?
5. Our neighbor: stranger or friend?
6. Technology: servant or master?

We began last week by considering this great gift of God: our mind. Made in the image of our Creator we have been given minds that can reason and discern. We can use our minds for great good or, sadly, for great evil. The mind that is not aligned with the mind of Christ will fall short of its God-given potential and be tempted to evil use. Christians have never been told to set their brains aside, rather to align their intelligence with the mind of Christ and use it for good. *Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*, Rom. 12:2. If we do not consciously choose to fill our minds with the wisdom of heaven, our minds will be filled with whatever is the prevailing thought-pattern, including morality, of the world around us.

Today let us consider the second issue Christians face: the body. We all have physical bodies in which we live - from birth to death. *These bodies are our earthly homes*. The question for Christians is this: is the body an idol or a temple? Is the physical body to be worshipped? Or is the body like a temple, meant to reflect our worship of God?

Bodies are Important

Firstly, our bodies are important. They are essential to who we are as persons ... those persons created in the image of God. God has created us that way. Now some people look in the mirror and say, "No thanks." They reject their body, want to send it back. But that's not a healthy response. Without the body there would be no life. In birth and in death the body must play an essential part. In both cases we learn that life is not easily comparable with other values, since all other values depend upon life to make them valuable. Formed by God from physical elements the body of humans must have the Spirit of God to have life. *Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being*, Gen. 2:7. *Spiritual life is integral to our physical life*.

God created Adam and Eve with perfect bodies and perfect health. But sin entered in and ruined it. Still, God wants you to be healthy and whole. That is why Jesus said: *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell*, Matt. 10:28.

When God chose to enter human history, He did so in a human body. Christ Jesus, *who, being in very nature God ... being made in human likeness ... found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death ... Phil 2:8*. Jesus laid hands on the sick and crippled to bring them the healing power of God. Jesus was raised from the dead bodily – not some ethereal, misty, spirit force, but a real body. [His dead body has never been found.] After His resurrection Jesus came among His disciples in bodily form. *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together ... Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord*, John 20:19-20.

Whenever we partake of holy communion we participate in a spiritual exercise within a physical act. St. Paul tells us; *The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."* *In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me,"* 1 Cor. 11:23-25.

Our remembrance entails the use of *tangible elements*: bread and wine. It isn't enough simply to say, "Remember!" The elements of bread and wine are given to stimulate our minds, hearts, and even taste buds. The physical action of eating and drinking remind us that we spiritually "ingest" and depend upon Jesus. Food and drink are essential to our physical existence. The blessings and benefits that come to us through the body and blood of Christ are essential to our spiritual flourishing. Spiritually we take the body of Christ into our bodies and together we are becoming the Body of Christ in this world.

Idol Worship

Anything that in our lives that we worship instead of Christ becomes an idol. One of the ways we can misuse our bodies is to idolize them. We live in a culture that in many ways just that. Physical beauty and physical prowess are splashed before us on magazine covers, movies and television, sports, glamorous models, health supplements, make-up, etc. Money spent on cosmetics, cosmetic surgery, hair replacement remedies, steroids, runs into the multi-millions every year. Not all of us have been gifted with exemplar bodies. I've never had the body that would give me a chance to play in the NBA or NFL. And when it comes to looks ... well, I have a face for radio. That's just the way it is. *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect, 1 Cor. 15:10.*

Some people use gyms for healthy exercise and that's good. Others use the gym to make themselves look buff or slim or whatever they deem appealing to the eye. They are constantly striving to have the perfect body – like some body builders and models. Have you heard about the young Ukrainian woman who has made herself to look like the Barbie doll? When we become fixated on our looks, our body type, how we measure up to the icons in our culture of physical beauty or perfection, we are making an idol of the body. Remember the 1st Commandment? *You shall have no other gods before Me, Deut. 5:7.*

Temple Of The Lord

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body, 1 Cor. 6:19-20.

Whether we have inherited beautiful bodies, with all the physical characteristics extolled by movies or sports ... or not ... our bodies are not only our homes, but also the vessels through which we can honor the Lord. *Our bodies, vessels of the Lord, are not to be idolized nor to be abused.*

The body is the servant of the mind. It obeys the operations of the mind, whether they be chosen by us or they are automatically expressed. *Aligning our minds with the mind of Christ brings our bodies into alignment.* Thoughts of disease and decay can actually facilitate disease and decay in our bodies, while glad and beautiful thoughts can enhance beauty and youth. If you would renew your body, beautify your mind. Thoughts of malice, envy, disappointment, despondency, rob the body of its health and grace. A sour face most often arises from sour thoughts. Here's St. Paul's advice: *whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things, Phil. 4:8.*

In our sex-obsessed culture Jews and Christians share the healthy believe that sex is a sacred physical union of a man and a woman that extends beyond the mere physical act. Sex is not a commodity to be put on display or bought and sold. It was designed by God as a sacred sharing of love that transcends the physical act. That is why Jews and Christians have always honored the marriage union of one man and one woman as the proper setting for sexual expression.

Neglecting our bodies is neglecting God's temple. Maintaining these earthen vessels must include attention to health, exercise and diet, cleanliness. Healthcare has long been a concern for Christians. Think of the many hospitals that have been established (going back over a thousand years) by Christian organizations. Caring for our bodies allows us to serve God well.

Yes, engaging in certain activities can actually destroy the body: smoking, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, under-eating, over-eating, unhealthy eating. Things detrimental to our health, that we choose to do, are things that disrespect what God has given us. *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as*

men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness, Romans 6:12-13.

Service to God includes using our bodily abilities to **help others**. There are worthy projects that need our physical attention and there are people whose bodies have failed them and who need our help. **As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead, James 2:26.**

When Bodies Fail

The physical body is a marvelous wonder ... a miracle really. God has gifted us with an amazing capacity to do things in our bodies and we are painfully aware when things in our bodies – or those of loved ones - do not operate as intended. Our bodies deteriorate over time. Because we are in this fallen world, even nature, which includes our bodies, is subject to brokenness and decay. There are those who have been short-changed by nature: born with physical ailments, incurable diseases, and disabilities. These are cruel tragedies, manifestations of the fallen-ness of all creation and not God's desire. God's desire is for the health and wholeness of His kingdom in our bodies, as Jesus demonstrated in His healings – whether through. In all cases there is opportunity for those afflicted and those who give care to deepen the spiritual life we have while on this earth. There is much room for us to pray – for miracle or medical breakthroughs - and to offer assistance and comfort. For one day all of us will be made whole in God's great grace ... complete in spirit, mind, and body.

Our physical **weaknesses** may contribute to our emotional and psychological weakness. But they **need not demean us spiritually**. St. Paul related that ... *a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me... Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses ... for when I am weak, then I am strong.* 2 Cor. 12:7-10.

In all our afflictions our Savior (who suffered great bodily harm, who overcame death) says to us: *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* Along with St. Paul we too can claim that for Christ's sake *when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Present Your Bodies

The body, like a temple, can be filled with God's mighty presence and thereby is meant to reflect our worship of God. What is the right attitude toward your body? Don't reject it. Don't idolize it. Don't neglect it. **Care for your body as though caring for the Lord's handiwork.** Just as we maintain this building for the worship of God, so our bodies must be maintained to worship the Lord. **I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship, Rom. 12:1.**

And when physical ailment, disability, or decline in ability comes upon you, remember that God is still with you. In Him we are made strong, and we will join Him one day in His kingdom.

One day there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away, Rev. 21:3-4.