

The High Calling

a bimonthly publication of The Francis Asbury Society

It Is Well, It Is Well with My Body

By Stan Key

Our culture is obsessed with the body. Whether we are talking about sports, food, tattoos, eating disorders, clothing (or lack thereof), drugs, exercise, or sex, our fixation on the body is evident everywhere we look. What seems to matter for most people today is not our character or our philosophy of life, but how we look and how we feel. While evangelical Christians may hear an occasional sermon on the importance of physical exercise and good eating habits as a form of self-discipline, one looks in vain in most churches to find a developed theology of body. What matters for most Christians, so it seems, is the soul. The body is typically regarded as a hindrance to our spirituality and the sooner we can be rid of it and go to our heavenly home, the better. What does the gospel have to do with the body? I'm so glad you asked!



This issue of *The High Calling* is devoted to what the Bible has to say about the body. As Christmas approaches, we remember how God enfleshed himself in a human body. The doctrine of the incarnation is an eternal reminder of the importance of the body; not only Jesus's body, but mine—and yours. Christmas is a good time

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The Only Thing That Has Ever Really Happened

By Bill Ury



Bill Ury has a doctorate from Drew University and is also a graduate of Asbury Theological Seminary. Bill taught at Wesley Biblical Seminary for nearly 24 years. He preaches weekly on the American Family Radio program, "The Hour of Holiness," and he and his wife, Diane, are pastors at Elizabeth City Evangelical Methodist Church (NC).

A character in one of Dorothy Sayers's plays makes this shocking statement about Jesus, "He is the only thing that has ever really happened." What a marvelous way to describe the doctrine of the Incarnation! Nothing has ever happened, nothing exists, no human experience matters one whit unless the Son of God took on flesh. He has a body that really exists forever.

Incarnation literally means "in flesh." The doctrine boldly proclaims that the Son of God

became a full, unadulterated, enfleshed human person in every respect (John 1:14). God did not come to us storming out of heaven. He did not send a surrogate or a delegate. He came himself. But he entered our world through the body of a teenage girl (Luke 1:38). The virgin conception and birth were the means God chose to make possible the miraculously true union of the divine and the human, of God and man.

At one time or another, we all ask the questions, "Who am I? Why am I here?" Without the Incarnation, we simply have no answer. Without Jesus,

my existence is not really real, because I have no understanding of my Source. My physical body, on its own, is a mangled mess damaged by sin. But in Mary's womb, the Spirit formed a human life that changes everything. And when I get a glimpse of who her Son really is, I begin to grasp that every aspect of my bodily existence



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Embodied Spirituality

By Dallas Willard (1935–2013)



Dallas Willard writes with biblical insight concerning the importance of our bodies in how we live out our call to holiness. The following is an abridgement of a chapter entitled “Transforming the Body” taken from his book, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 159–77.

For good or for evil, the body lies right at the center of the spiritual life—a strange combination of words to most people. One can immediately see all around us that the human body is a (perhaps in some cases even *the*) primary barrier to conformity to Christ. But this certainly was not God’s intent for the body. Our body is a good thing. God made it for good. That is why the way of Jesus Christ is so relentlessly incarnational. The body *should* be cherished and properly cared for, not as our master, however, but as a servant of God. For most people, on the other hand, their body *governs* their life. And *that* is the problem.

Incarnation is not just an essential fact about Jesus: that “Christ is come in the flesh.” Rather, he came in the flesh, a real human body, in order that he might bring redemption and deliverance to our bodies. Our body is an essential part of who we are, and no redemption that omits it is full redemption. Those who deny that Christ has come in real flesh are antichrist, John said (I John 4:3).

Such a strong position is taken in the New Testament because redemption is in the first place for “the life which I now live in the flesh” (Gal. 2:20). This present life is caught up *now* in the eternal life of God. But of course “the life I now live in the flesh” is inseparable from the mortal body I now have. So it too must become holy, must “come over” to Christ’s side. “As He is, so also are we in this world” (I John 4:17).

The redemption of the body will be *completed* later, but even now, “if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Rom. 8:11). We are to know now “the power of His resurrection” (Phil. 3:10). Our body is not just a physical system but is inhabited by the real presence of Christ.

Spiritual formation requires the transformation of the body. The proper retraining and nurturing of the body is absolutely essential to Christlikeness. The greatest danger to our prospects for spiritual transformation at

this point is that we will fail to take all this talk about our bodily parts very literally.

The tongue, for example. James said that “the tongue is a small member of the body” (James 3:5). However, it has incredible power to stir up the inclinations of the whole body and of all its parts. No one can tame it, James said. Physical violence nearly always is introduced by verbal violence. It is only as we habitually subject the tongue to the grace of God as an instrument reserved for him, to do his will, that grace comes literally to inhabit and govern it.



“The body *should* be cherished and properly cared for, not as our master, however, but as a servant of God. ”

A burning sense of these powers of evil actually inhabiting our body and specific parts thereof is one of the reasons *body hatred*, throughout the ages and across cultures, has been such a dreadful fact. Sincere people really do find evil in their body and wrongly blame the body for it.

This misguided and terribly harmful attitude toward the body correctly sees the power of sin that really is in the actual body and its parts. But it mistakenly assumes that the evil *is* the body and its parts. In this respect Paul’s teaching that we are to “present our bodily parts

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to remember that the atoning blood of Calvary and the sanctifying Spirit of Pentecost have been given not just to save our *souls* but to redeem our *bodies*!

Like many evangelicals today, first-century Christians in the church at Corinth had no clue how faith in Christ related to their bodies. Influenced by gnostic notions from their Greek cultural context, these believers tended to think that matter didn't really matter. What counts is spirit. What I do with my body has no bearing on how I live in my soul. Such fuzzy thinking produced a dangerous syncretism that Paul felt compelled to address. "Don't you know," he wrote, "that your *bodies* are members of Christ?... Don't you know that your *body* is a temple of the Holy Spirit?" (I Cor. 6:15, 19). For many members of the church in Corinth, the response was a clear and decisive, "No, Paul, we had no idea!"

Two slogans seemed to summarize how the Corinthians' understood their own bodies. These slogans are important because they continue to characterize many evangelical churches today. Even as Paul wrote the letter of First Corinthians to address such heretical thinking, so we need voices today to address the destructive gnostic philosophies so prevalent in the contemporary church.

All things are lawful for me (I Cor. 6:12; 10:23). One can imagine bumper stickers, coffee mugs, and banners hanging in the worship center at Corinth Church that boldly proclaimed this slogan. The words undoubtedly reflected the Corinthians' understanding of Paul's preaching that declared we are all free in Christ; we are not under law but under grace. Jesus loves us just as we are. The Corinthians took this to mean that we can, therefore, do whatever we like with our bodies. My soul

is saved. My heart is at peace. My spirit is alive. So who cares what I do with my body?

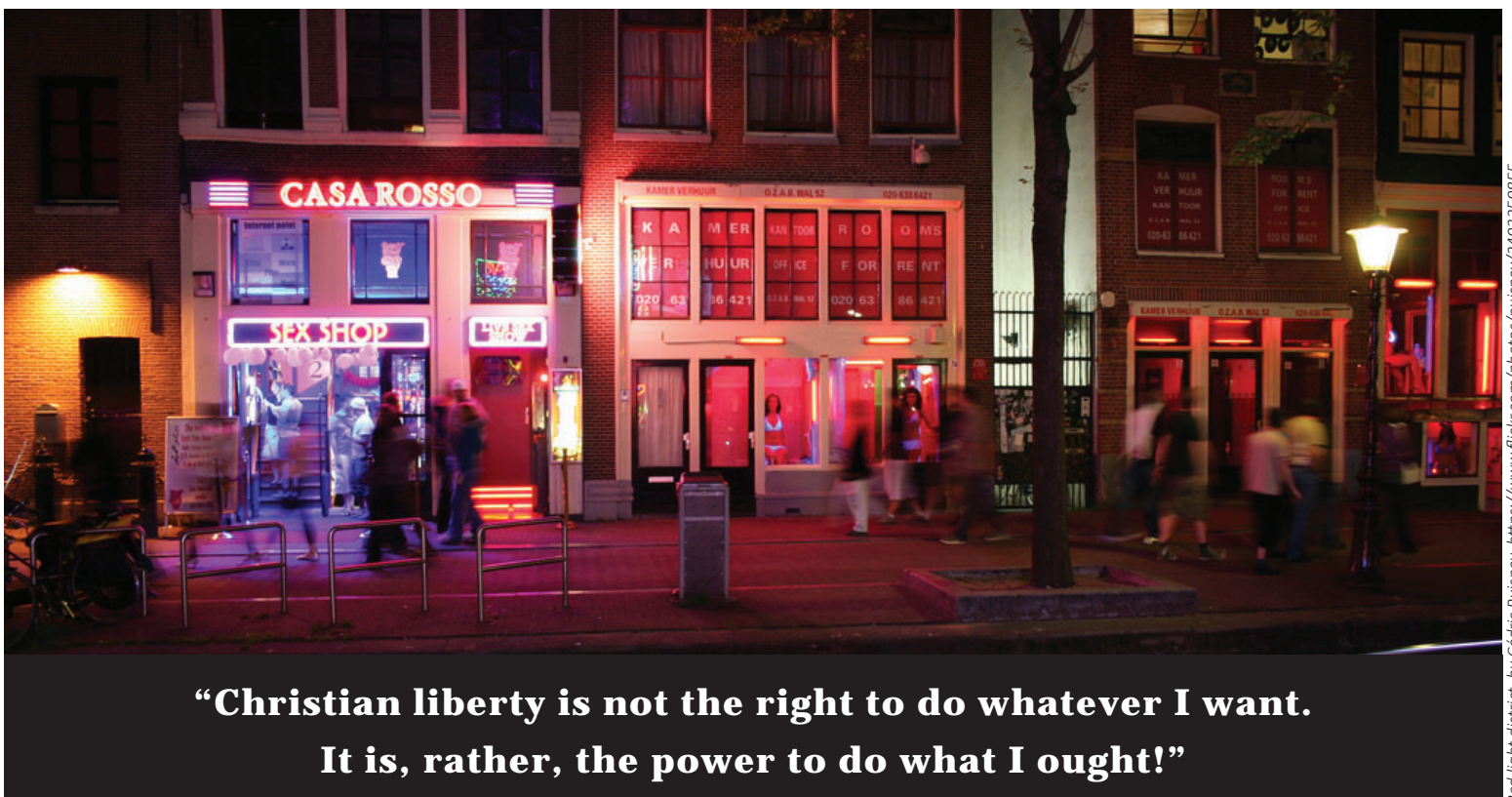
This sloganized theology produced Christians who testified to being saved from sin while they continued to live in it! These gnostic believers saw no discrepancy in worshiping God with their spirits while they paid tribute to the devil with their bodies. The American church today is full of this kind of theological nonsense! Paul wrote strong words to professing Christians who had perverted the grace of God into license:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (I Corinthians 6:9–10)

Christian liberty is not the right to do whatever I want. It is, rather, the power to do what I ought!

Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food (I Cor. 6:13). By this second slogan, the Corinthian Christians claimed that just as God made food for the stomach so he made sex for the body. It is a natural need and should be satisfied without hesitancy or shame. If it feels right, then it *is* right. So go ahead and satisfy those inner urges and impulses. This is how nature made you, so be who you are. If you are hungry, then eat. If you have sexual drives, then satisfy them. In fact, if you repress these hungers, you will become psychologically damaged.

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**“Christian liberty is not the right to do whatever I want.
It is, rather, the power to do what I ought!”**

Good News for Broken Bodies

By Daniel E. Fountain, M.D. (1930–2013)



Medical missionary to the Congo and a recognized authority on AIDS, Dr. Fountain has a rich background for helping to understand sickness and sin, health and holiness. The following article is taken from *God, Medicine & Miracles: The Spiritual Factor in Healing* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 1999), 105–09 and 182–85.

I have based my life and my professional career on the premise that God wants us to be healthy. I believe this is what the Bible teaches us, and medical science is likewise committed to this premise. Here are three reasons I believe God wants us to have health.

1. Disease and death were not part of Eden. The account of the Garden of Eden is very brief, but there are sufficient reasons to conclude that disease, disasters, and death were not part of the Edenic life of Adam and Eve. Were there mosquitoes in the Garden? Was the tuberculosis bacillus there, or viruses, or the streptococcus germ? Obviously, we do not know, but it is safe to assume that, even if they were there, they did not affect Adam and Eve. That would have been contrary to God's original plan of life for them, a plan for life and not for death, for health and not for illness.
2. Jesus, God's Son, came to do the will of his Father and to accomplish the work God sent him to do. A primary focus of Jesus's ministry on earth was healing sick people. If God wanted us to be sick, why did he send his Son to heal the sick? And why did his Son then tell us to do the same thing?

3. There will be no suffering, crying, or pain in heaven (Rev. 21:4). In heaven we will experience the perfect relationship with God that he intended in the beginning. God promises that this eternal life will be free of pain and illness.

To help us lead healthy and productive lives, God gave us laws, regulations, and guidelines regarding our behaviors and our inner life. Their purpose is not to confine or inhibit us. Rather they are to guide our living so that we can approach the abundant life Jesus offers and maximize our creative possibilities.

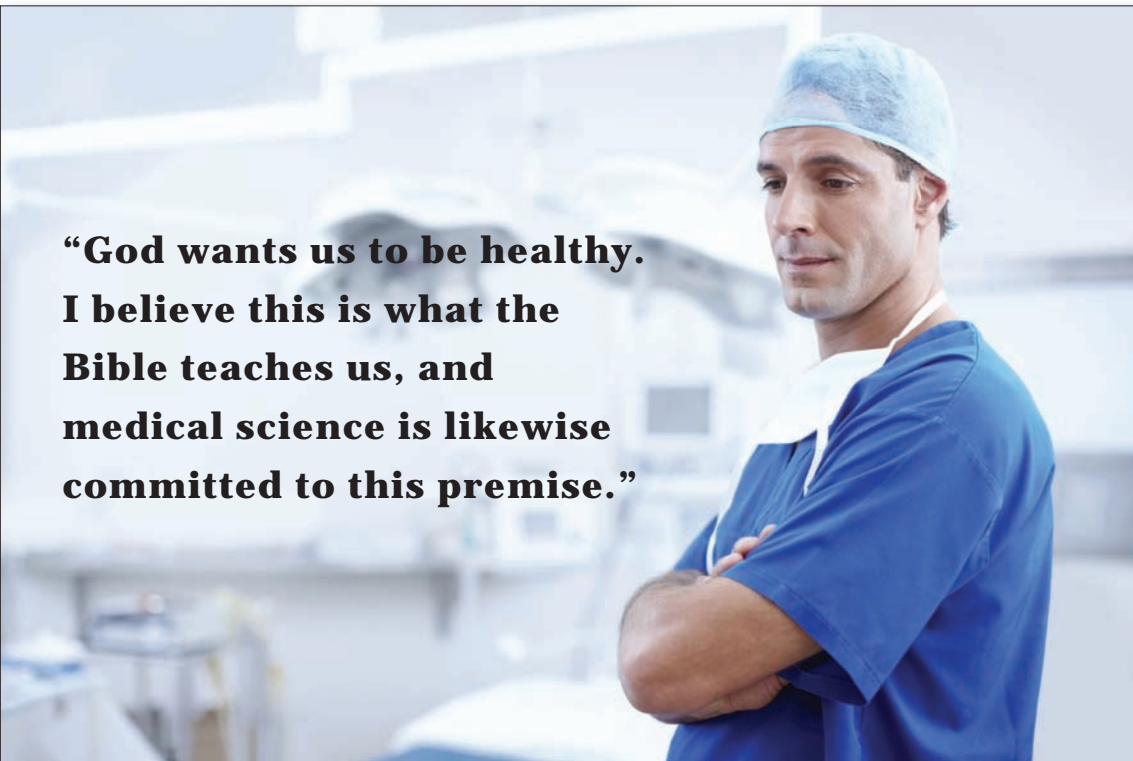
If original sin led to illness, disorder, and death in the world, then does that mean that when I become ill, it's because I have sinned? We must be very careful here. There is more than one answer to this question.

Personal sin can have a physical effect on us. Specific sins can in fact lead to certain illnesses and diseases. Sexually transmitted diseases are an obvious example. Habits of poor hygiene or faulty nutrition open the door to many diseases. We are well aware of the links between habits of addiction and the diseases they can cause. We are not as conscious of how attitudinal habits of high stress and of frequent interpersonal confrontations can damage our organ systems, but these problems are real, widespread in society, and can actually lead to death. In such cases there is a direct link between sin and illness.

Personal sin can have a psychological effect on us. Holding onto destructive emotions such as anger, jealousy, or hatred can either cause certain stress-related illnesses or else weaken the immune system and thus allow a disease

to develop. They can act on other organs in the body to cause disturbances such as increased blood pressure, an elevated level of cholesterol, spasms of muscles in organs such as the lungs or the intestines, or inflammation in other tissues. In this case, we can say that sinful thoughts, emotions, or behaviors act as predisposing factors that can lead to illness.

Other people's sins can lead to our illness. We must also recognize that much illness comes, not because of personal sin but as a result of

A photograph of a man in a blue surgical cap and blue scrubs, standing in a hospital setting. He is looking off to the side with a serious expression. The background is slightly blurred, showing hospital equipment and other people.

“God wants us to be healthy. I believe this is what the Bible teaches us, and medical science is likewise committed to this premise.”

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Sound familiar? The similarities between first-century Corinth and 21st-century America are startling. Many Christians today unknowingly are drinking from the same polluted gnostic fountain as the believers to whom Paul was writing so long ago.

In one amazing paragraph (I Cor. 6:12–20), Paul makes six revolutionary statements about the body. He wants Christians everywhere to understand that the gospel is not just for the soul and spirit—Jesus died to redeem our bodies as well!

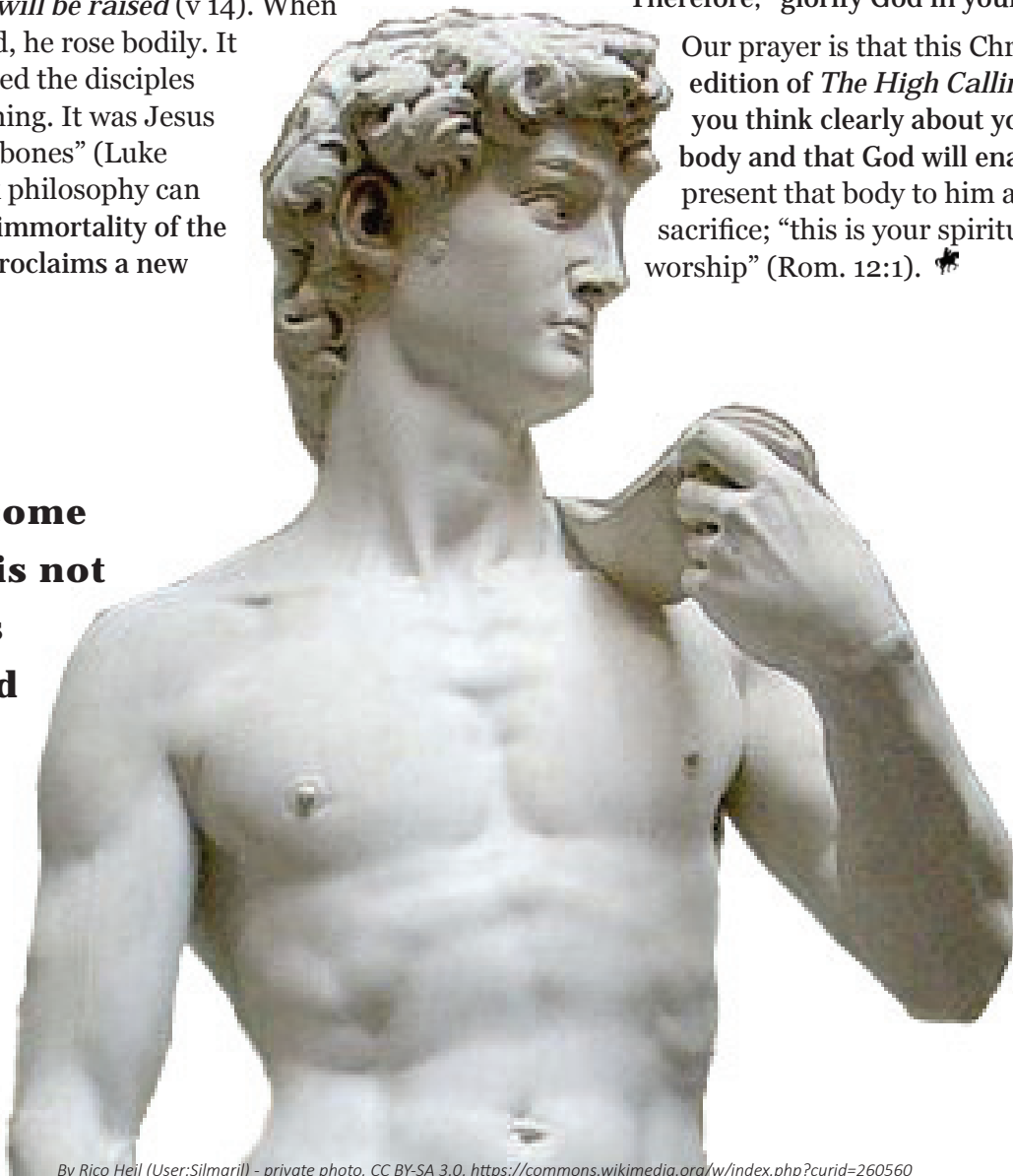
1. *The body is meant to be my servant, not my master.* Everything is permissible for me, but I will not be mastered by anything (v 12). Whether we are talking about desires related to food, drugs, or sex, the gospel is crystal clear: because of Christ within us, we are no longer slaves but masters of our bodies.
2. *The body is for the Lord, not for immorality* (v 13). We are not animals. Our deepest longing for intimacy can never be found through sex. People who wander from one relationship to another, searching for love in all the wrong places, need be told that our bodies are meant for union with Christ. Only *he* can satisfy.
3. *After death, our bodies will be raised* (v 14). When Jesus rose from the dead, he rose bodily. It wasn't a spirit that greeted the disciples on that first Easter morning. It was Jesus himself, with "flesh and bones" (Luke 24:36–43). While Greek philosophy can wax eloquent about the immortality of the soul, the gospel boldly proclaims a new

order of being: the resurrection of the body! And because Jesus rose bodily, all those who trust in him will one day do the same.

4. *My body is a member of Christ's body* (vv 15–17). When we become Christians, it is not only our souls that are united with Christ but also our very bodies become members of his body. This means we should be very careful what we do with our bodies.
5. *Sins of the body are therefore to be taken very seriously.* Paul's words are strong: "Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body" (v 18). Paul seems to be saying that sexual sins are in a different category from other sins. Sexual sins go to the very roots of our identity.
6. *My body is the temple of the Holy Spirit* (v 19). Earlier in this letter, when Paul said "you are God's temple" (I Cor. 3:16), the reference was plural. He was speaking of the Christian community as God's dwelling place. But here, the reference is to the individual, human body. Therefore, my body does not belong to me; it belongs to God! He lives inside and is very concerned about what happens to his property! Therefore, "glorify God in your body."

Our prayer is that this Christmas edition of *The High Calling* will help you think clearly about your own body and that God will enable you to present that body to him as a living sacrifice; "this is your spiritual act of worship" (Rom. 12:1). ✠

"When we become Christians, it is not only our souls that are united with Christ but also our very bodies become members of his body."



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There Are No Ordinary People

By C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)



This article is an abridgement from one of Lewis' most famous essays, "The Weight of Glory" (*The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996, 23–40).

The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are

told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire. If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

Now if we are made for heaven, the desire for our proper place will be already in us, but not yet attached to the true object, the rival of for some-actually-ence. Our is to call

and will even appear as that object. It is a desire thing that has never appeared in our experiential life. It is the commonest expedient it beauty and behave as if that had settled the matter. The books or music in which we thought the

beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not *in* them, it only came *through* them, and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.

It may be asked what practical use there is in the speculations which I have been indulging. I can think of at least one such use. It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbor. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbor's glory should be laid on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations.

It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But

civilizations—these life is to ours as it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously. Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses. ✠

“You have never talked to a mere mortal.”

By Marie-Lan Nguyen - Own work, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=487606>

Sex Is Not Just About Sex

By Christopher West



Christopher West has done a great service in summarizing and simplifying Pope John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*. While many may find the pope's writing both too academic and frankly too "catholic", West succeeds in helping Christians of every label understand the importance of John Paul's work. The following is an excerpt from the first chapter of West's book, *Theology of the Body for Beginners* (West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2009), 1–16.

“Theology of the body” is the working title Pope John Paul II gave to the first major teaching project of his pontificate. In 129 short talks delivered between September of 1979 and November of 1984, the Pope offered the Church and the world a rich, biblical reflection on the meaning of human embodiment, particularly as it concerns sexuality and erotic desire.

Catholic theologian George Weigel describes John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* as “one of the boldest reconfigurations of Catholic theology in centuries”—“a kind of *theological time-bomb* set to go off with dramatic consequences... perhaps in the twenty-first century.” At this point the Pope's vision of sexual love “has barely begun to shape the Church's theology, preaching, and religious education.” But when it does, Weigel predicts, “it will compel a dramatic development of thinking about virtually every major theme in the Creed.”

Why might the Pope's study of sexual love impact “every major theme in the Creed”? Because sex is not just about sex. The way we understand and express our sexuality points to our deepest-held convictions about who we are, who God is, the meaning of love, the ordering of society, and even the ordering of the universe.

To ask questions about the meaning of the human body starts us on an exhilarating journey. We are all so interested in sex! The union of the sexes is a “great mystery” that leads us into the heart of God's plan for the cosmos (see Eph. 5:31–33). But we must stay the course because a great many obstacles, prejudices, taboos, and fears can easily derail us as we face the enigma of our own embodiment as male and female. The temptation to “spiritualize” our humanity and, even more, to “spiritualize” Christ and the Church is constant and fierce. The enemy incessantly denies Christ come in the flesh (see I John 4:2–3). But only by pondering Christ's *body* can we understand our own.

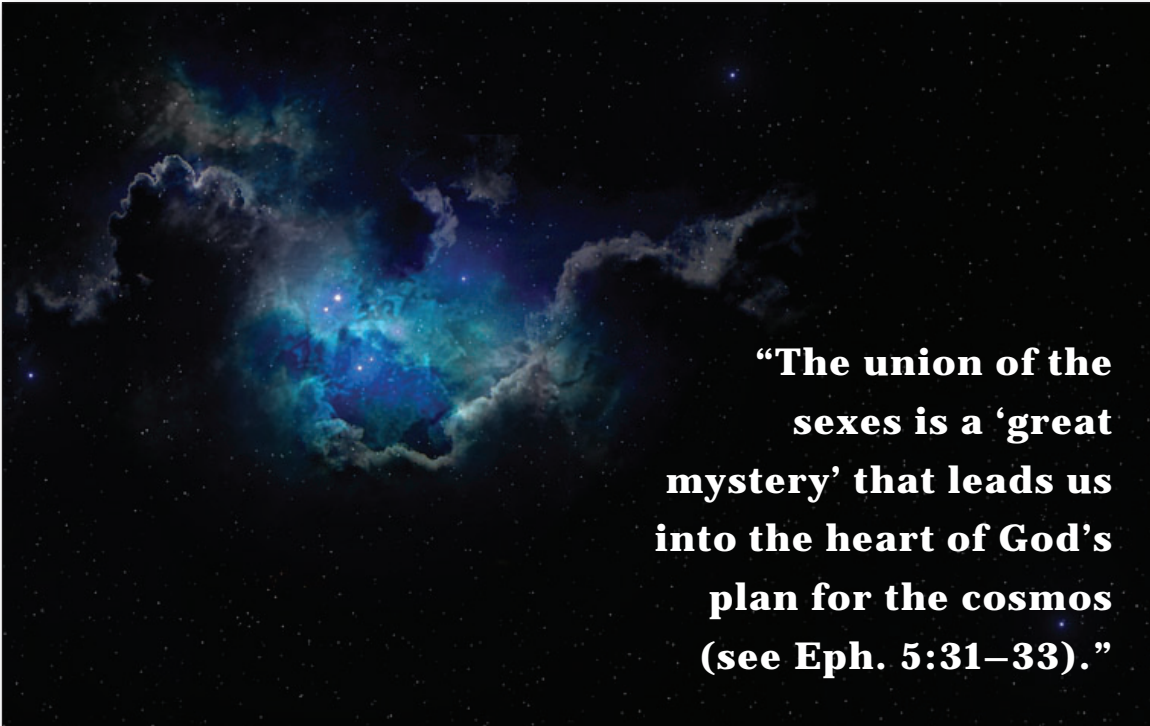
When it comes to religion, people are used to an emphasis on the spiritual realm. However, many people are unfamiliar, and sometimes even uncomfortable, with an emphasis on the body. But this is a false and extremely dangerous divide. By taking on a body through the incarnation, God humbly meets us right here—in our physical, human state.

Tragically, many Christians grow up thinking of their bodies (especially their sexuality) as inherent obstacles to the spiritual life. Many think Christian teaching considers their spirits to be “good” and their bodies to be “bad.” Such thinking couldn't be further from an authentic Christian perspective! The idea that the human body is “bad” is actually a *heresy* known as Manichaeism.

Mani (or Manichaeus), after whom this false teaching is named, condemned the body and all things sexual because he saw in the material world the source of evil. As Christians we believe everything God created is “very good” (see Gen. 1:31).

In other words, if Manichaeism says “the body is bad,” Christianity says “the body is so good that you cannot even fathom it.”

The problem with our sex-saturated culture, then, is not that it overvalues the body and sex. The problem is that it has failed to see just how valuable the body and sex really are. *Christianity does not reject the body!*



“The union of the sexes is a ‘great mystery’ that leads us into the heart of God’s plan for the cosmos (see Eph. 5:31–33).”

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the sins of others. This is true at an individual level but it is also true in terms of corporate sins. The health of many has been affected by industrial toxins dumped in our soil or water, atmospheric pollution, and paying employees less than a living wage. The corporate sins of systemic violence and warfare have reached tragic proportions and are sacrificing the lives and health of millions of people.

Sometimes there is no clear relationship between sin and sickness. In many cases, there seem to be no sinful behaviors involved. Even here, however, a bit of introspection can be helpful. How am I responding to this illness? If I dwell on thoughts and feelings of bitterness, or let anger toward others or God fester, or refuse to respond positively to the situation, I am harming myself.

King David had a marvelous God-given insight into the healing process. In Psalm 103:1–5 he outlines the fascinating progression that can take place from the darkness and despair of illness to glorious health. This is what he says:

Praise the Lord, my soul! All my being, praise his holy name! Praise the Lord, my soul, and do not forget how kind he is. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. He keeps me from the grave and blesses me with love and mercy. He fills my life with good things, so that I stay young and strong like an eagle.

David starts with praise to God. Praising God lifts our view from ourselves, our troubles, or our hepatitis,

chronic fatigue syndrome, cancer, or high blood pressure to God himself. In praise we concentrate on the goodness of God and what he has done. This can bring joy into the thoughts, feelings, and emotions, and this joy can strengthen the immune system. Praise is good for our health!

David reflects on what God has done for him. In spite of the most horrible circumstances in which we may find ourselves (and David himself got into many frightful messes), we can always identify something that shows the goodness of God. Putting our thoughts on that, however small it may be, can lift our spirits from the darkness of despair to a tiny point of light and hope.

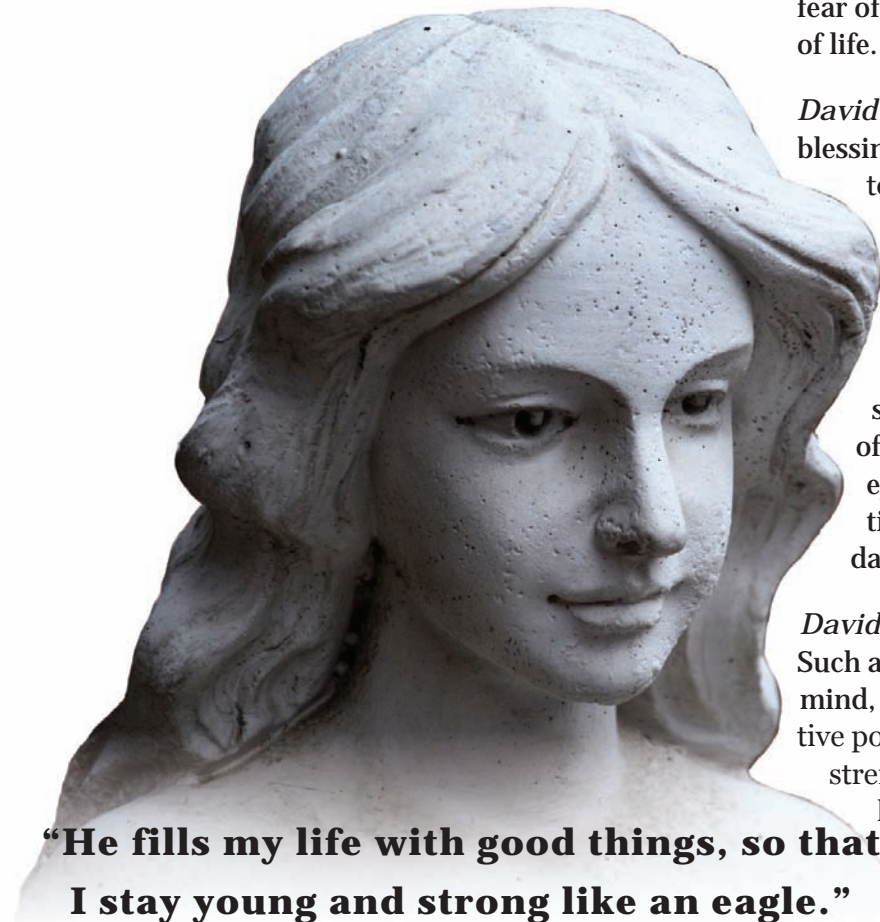
David recognizes that forgiveness of sin leads to healing of disease. From his own experience, David was deeply aware of how the forgiveness of sin brings new life and renewed physical strength. He wrote two psalms about this—Psalm 32 and 51. I’ve learned that the confession of sins that have nothing whatsoever to do with the illness is also therapeutic. Confession opens the “rooms” of the heart to Jesus, the great “Heart Cleaner,” making room for his peace and joy.

David sees despair and the fear of death as affecting health and recuperative powers. Deliverance from despair and from the fear of the grave comes from God as we permit him to lead us through the above steps, and as we respond to what he is in the process of doing. God will not exempt us from physical death, for we all will eventually die. But God can take away the frightful weight of the fear of death, thus freeing us in the meantime for fullness of life.

David receives blessings and mercy from God. The word blessing means happiness. When our minds are turned toward God, when we reflect on what he has done, and when we receive forgiveness and the healing of heart, mind, and spirit with deliverance from the fear of death, all kinds of good and happy things can occur. We begin noticing the intricate design at the center of a flower, the wonderful scent of newly mown grass, the mood-lifting power of music, and the smiles of family and friends. The eyes and ears of our hearts are opened to the beauties and delights of life as we are set free from the darkness of despair.

David accepts the health and strength God provides. Such a song of confession and praise leads to health of mind, heart, and spirit. By strengthening the recuperative powers of the body, it can often lead to increased strength. In many cases (though not all) it can even lead to complete physical healing. Once again we can feel “young and strong like an eagle.” ✨

“He fills my life with good things, so that I stay young and strong like an eagle.”



now has eternal significance. The immaterial Son has taken on my flesh. My matter matters!

Jesus came in human flesh in order to defeat the sin and death that were at work in my flesh. Summarizing Athanasius, C. S. Lewis wrote, “He was so full of life that when He wished to die He had to borrow death from others.” He took my sin and died my death so that he could offer me life. Though Jesus was sinless, I’m not. Therefore, for me to be in relationship with my Creator, God had to deal with my sin. He does this so realistically. He could justly punish me for my sins, but that wouldn’t solve the problem. My sin would remain. To redeem, to salvage humanity, God must identify with me. This means he chose to know the “real” me inside out. He conjoined his life with our decrepit humanness. This is what the en-fleshment of God is all about. He actually became one of us (Phil. 2:7–8). It is sobering to look at oneself in the mirror and exclaim, “He became this!” He came into the unreality our sin produced and offered us himself—real, tangible, Life. What a transaction! What an exchange! It is true, the incarnation is the only thing that has ever really happened. Without the Incarnation, nothing is really real. He gives meaning to everything.

Occasionally, our worship at Christmas refers to this mind-blowing theme. Here is the One who upholds the universe by the word of his power lying at the breast of his mother. As he nurses, he sustains reality. He draws life from his mother, while everything else in the universe is drawing its life from him (Col. 1:15–20). But wonder of wonders, in looking at him, *my* humanity begins to make sense! My weakness and dependence are understood. Could it be that the very purpose of having a body is to image the life of the Son? Maybe my body is not a trap or a cruel joke. Perhaps he can make it what he designed it for and desires to recreate it to be.

After sitting through a typical sermon, a deeply damaged man responded to the preacher: “I came here because I needed an answer to my brokenness. I needed a transfusion but all you offered was a Band-Aid!” Christmas reminds us that Jesus did not come to offer us a Band-Aid; he came to deal with the problem of sin at its root. His coming means that a genuine transfusion of Life is possible for all who believe in him. This is no theological shell game. This is for real!

Sin destroys our true humanness because it distorts and damages the image of God in us. Our sinful bodies mean that we become unreal, living in a world detached from reality. But Mary’s Jesus is a real Savior who came to deal with undeniable sin and offer us substantial salvation. He didn’t come to antiseptically apply some blood to cover up a legal problem. He came to destroy the works of the devil (I John 3:8). He took a body to change us at the deepest levels. He was enfleshed to remake us into the image of God. He doesn’t merely justify. He sanctifies; he reforms us into his likeness. Salvation is not just something done *for* me, it is something done *in* me, in my flesh. His all-encompassing coming means that my human life can be like his! Listen again to Athanasius: “The Word of God, immaterial, incorruptible entered my world and out of his love he came to me... He took to himself a body no different from mine because... he wanted to make me like himself.”

Jesus was born in Bethlehem so that he could save us from sin. He became fully human so that he could save us to the uttermost. Because he came as embodied holiness, he makes possible a life of purity in body and soul! Disciplines and works are externals, which are powerless to deal with the problem of inbred sin. Only Jesus of Bethlehem can do that! When he lives his life in us, then real victory is possible (Gen. 3:15).

“He comes to make the unreal real.”



This is the solid gospel of Christmas. During the celebration of the Incarnation, why don’t you tell him, “Jesus, I know I’m a total mess, but I want to be whole; I want to be clean; I want to be like you.” He can answer that prayer out of his enfleshed and saving Life. He alone has the enthralling and personal power to say, “All right, let’s get at it.” And when he has access to all your life you will realize that he comes to make the unreal real; that Jesus truly is the only thing that has ever really happened. ✠

Think of your own reality as a human being. Human nature is both spiritual and physical. We aren't spirits "trapped" in our bodies. The Church has always maintained that we are embodied spirits, or spiritualized bodies. Through the profound union of body and soul in each of us, our bodies *reveal* or "make visible" the invisible reality of our spirits. But the body does even more. Because we are made in God's image, our bodies also make visible something of God's invisible mystery. It is from this perspective that John Paul wants to study the human body—not as a biological organism, but as a *theology*, as a "study of God." The body is not divine. But it is a "sign of the divine mystery. A sign is something that points us to a reality beyond itself and, in some way, makes that transcendent reality present to us."

Scripture uses many images to describe God's love for humanity. Each has its own valuable place. But both Old and New Testaments use the image of spousal love far more than any other. The Bible begins in Genesis with the marriage of the first man and woman, and it ends in Revelation with another "marriage"—the marriage of Christ and the Church. Spousal theology looks to these nuptial "book ends" as a key for interpreting all that lies between. Through this lens we learn that God's eternal plan is to "marry" us (see Hos. 2:19)—to live with us in an eternal exchange of love and communion.

Ponder this for a moment. If the body and sex are meant to proclaim our union with God, and if there is an enemy who wants to separate us from God, what do you think he is going to attack? If we want to know what is most sacred in this world, all we need do is look for what is most violently profaned. The enemy is no dummy. He knows that the body and sex are meant to proclaim the divine mystery. And from his perspective, *this proclamation must be stifled*. Men and women must be kept from recognizing the mystery of God in their bodies.

For now, the point to keep in mind is that the battle for man's soul is fought over the truth of his body. If we are to win the spiritual battle, what St. Paul says we must do—I kid you not, look it up—is "gird our loins with truth" (Eph. 6:14).

The stakes are incredibly high in the cultural debate about the meaning of sex and marital love. When we tinker

with God's plan for sex, we are tinkering with the cosmic stream of human existence. The human race—its existence, its balance—is literally determined by who is having sex with whom, and, in what manner. When sexual union is oriented towards love and life, it builds families and, in turn, cultures that live the truth of love and life. When it is oriented against love and life, the sexual act breeds death—what John Paul II grimly, yet accurately, describes as a "culture of death."

Why do we kill approximately 4,000 unborn babies every day in the United States alone? Because we are misusing and abusing God's great gift of sex. Make no mistake: in the final analysis, the abortion debate is not about when life begins. It is about the meaning of sex. What most men and women who fight for abortion want is not so much the "right" to kill their offspring, but the "right" to have unrestricted sex without consequences.

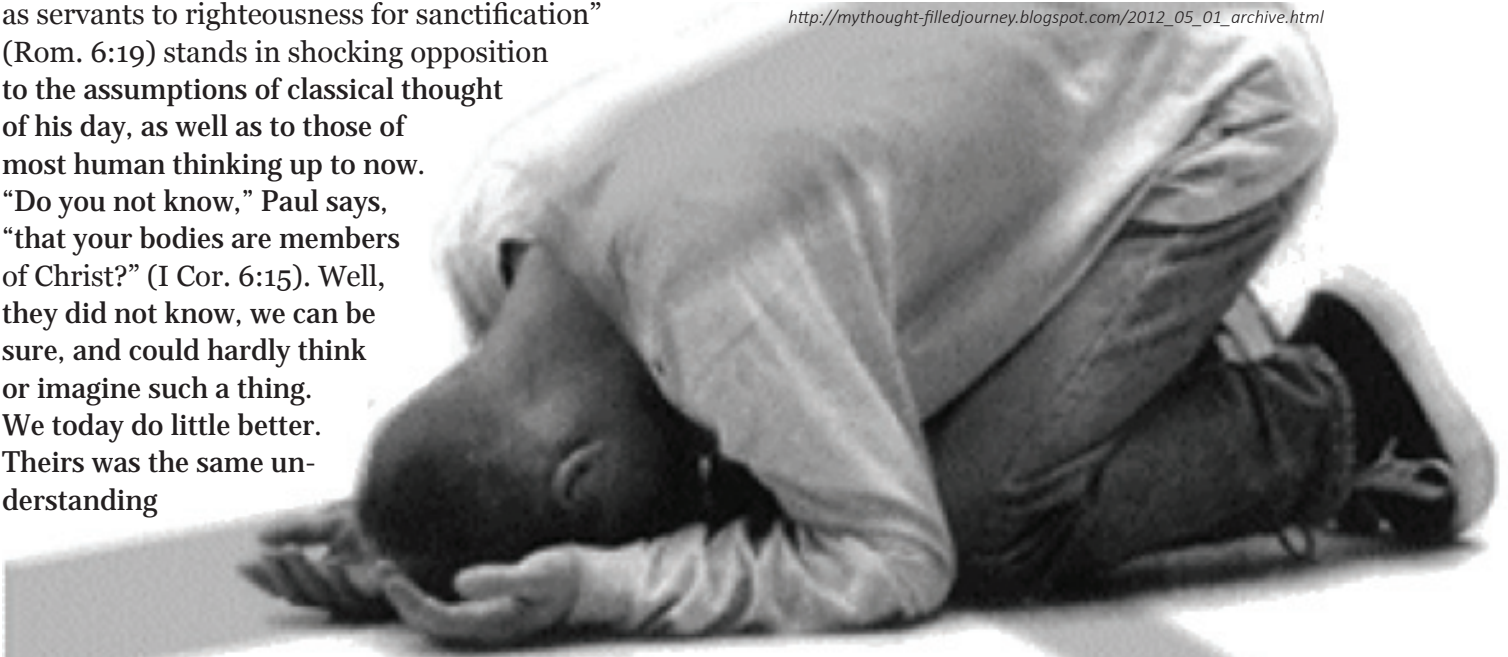
It is no exaggeration to say that the task of the twentieth century was to rid itself of the Christian sexual ethic. If we are to build a "culture of life," the task of the twenty-first century must be to reclaim it. But the often repressive approach of previous generations of Christians—usually silence or, at most, the incomplete "don't do it" mantra—is largely responsible for the cultural jet-tisoning of the Church's teaching on sex. We need a "new language" to break the silence and reverse the negativity. We need a fresh theology that explains how the Christian sexual ethic—far from being the prudish list of prohibitions it is often assumed to be—corresponds perfectly with the deepest yearnings of our hearts for love and union. A return to God's original plan for the union of the sexes is the only adequate starting point for building a culture that respects the meaning and dignity of human life. ✠



"When we tinker with God's plan for sex, we are tinkering with the cosmic stream of human existence."

(Rom. 6:19) stands in shocking opposition to the assumptions of classical thought of his day, as well as to those of most human thinking up to now.

“Do you not know,” Paul says, “that your bodies are members of Christ?” (I Cor. 6:15). Well, they did not know, we can be sure, and could hardly think or imagine such a thing. We today do little better. Theirs was the same understanding



“Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” (Romans 12:1)

of the body that led Paul’s hearers in Athens to scoff at the idea of a resurrection of the body (Acts 17:32). “Who wants *that* thing back?” you can almost hear them say. It was inconceivable to them that the physical body and its parts should be honored and treasured as the habitation of God in redeemed human personality. And the same is true for most people today—and indeed for most professing Christians.

What are some things that can be done to place our body and its parts fully at the disposal of the redeeming power that God intends to live in them? What should we do? There are a number of things.

1. *We must actually release our body to God.* That is what Paul means when he tells us “to present our body to God as a living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1). It needs to be a definite action, renewed as appropriate, perhaps on a yearly basis. You will not drift into this position before God, and you will not, without decisive action, stay there. Perhaps you could do it like this. Take a day in silent and solitary retreat. I recommend that you lie on the floor, face down or face up, and explicitly and formally surrender your body to God. Then take time to go over the main parts of your body and do the same for each one. What you want to do is to ask God to *take charge* of your body and each part, to fill it with his life and use it for his purposes.
2. *No longer idolize your body.* What does that mean? It means that you no longer make it an object of “ultimate concern.” You have, after all, given it up to God, and he can do with it as he wishes. You have taken your hands off of “outcomes” with respect to it, and you care for it only as it serves God’s purposes in your life and the lives of others. You don’t worry

about what will happen to it—sickness, repulsiveness, aging, death—for you have placed God in charge of all that. You take good care of your body, but only within the framework of values clearly laid down by God and exemplified in Jesus Christ. You don’t live in fear of your body and what it might “do to you.”

3. *Do not misuse your body.* This means primarily two things. *First*, do not use it as a source of sensual gratification. Bodily pleasure is not in itself a bad thing. But when it is exalted to a necessity and we become dependent upon it, then we are slaves to our body and its feelings. Only misery lies ahead. *Second*, do not use your body to dominate or control others. For example, we do not present our body in ways that elicit sexual thoughts, feelings, and actions from others. We do not try to be “sexy.” Another example has to do with intimidation by means of our body. There are many aspects of this, including “power dressing,” sarcasm, and “knowing” looks and remarks. A final example is overwork. It is now said that work is the new “drug of choice.” Often this is associated with excessive competition and trying to beat others out in some area of our common life. Sometimes this is just a matter of wearing our body out in order to succeed.
4. *Now, the positive counterpart: The body is to be properly honored and cared for.* The body must be regarded as holy because it is owned and inhabited by God. Of course that means it will be withheld from engagement in what is wrong. “The body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body” (I Cor. 6:13). That being so, “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?” (v 15). Because our body is holy (separated to God), we will also properly care for it: nourish, exercise, and rest it. ✪

New Board Chair for FAS



In their meeting on October 21, 2016, the board of directors of The Francis Asbury Society elected Rev. Dr. Christopher T. Bounds as chair to replace Dr. Charlie Fiskeaux, who will be retiring after having served 20 years on the board, of which 17 were as chair.

The transition will be effective at the close of the April 2017 board meeting.

Dr. Bounds is a Wesleyan theologian in the academic world, presently serving as Wesley Scholar and chair of the Christian Studies and Philosophy Department at Asbury University. Other academic service includes faculty positions at Indiana Wesleyan University, Asbury Theological Seminary, and Wesley Biblical Seminary. He is a widely published author, including numerous academic and popular books and articles. Dr. Bounds is an ordained elder in The Arkansas Conference of The United Methodist Church and serves many church and camp meeting pulpits. In addition to serving on the board of directors of The Francis Asbury Society, Dr. Bounds also serves on the board of directors of One Mission Society, with prior service on the board of directors of Asbury University and Good News.

From Our Readers

Thank you for your wonderfully encouraging responses to the past few issues of *The High Calling*. Here are just a few we've received:

- *I sincerely believe that this "High Calling" has shaped my understanding of the significance of true repentance. My life will never be the same.*
- *Thank you, Abba Father, for making this anointed magazine possible....*
- *The recent issue of The High Calling on Marah, seasons of bitterness, is superb! All articles are substantial and challenging.*
- *Thank you for the wonderful latest issue of The High Calling. I was thoroughly engaged in every article....*

The High Calling—November–December 2016

The High Calling is a bimonthly publication of The Francis Asbury Society to serve as a link between FAS and its constituents, building loyalty and awareness so that the teaching and experience of Christian holiness may continue to be lived and proclaimed throughout the world.

The Francis Asbury Society

P.O. Box 7 · Wilmore, KY 40390 · 859-858-4222

FAS@francisasburysociety.com | www.francisasburysociety.com

Managing Editor: Stan Key

Editing/Design/Layout: Jennie Lovell

Contributors: Bill Ury, Daniel E. Fountain, C. S. Lewis, Christopher West, and Dallas Willard

www.francisasburysociety.com

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