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## OUR BODIES ARE GOOD—AND IMPORTANT

“Wouldn’t it be great if we didn’t have these bodies to contend with?” The question came from Jim, the man who had led me to the Lord, a man who like me was at the time a new believer. Without a second’s hesitation I gave my hearty agreement. We didn’t have to explain to each other what we meant. Like so many Christians we felt that our bodies with all their unruly appetites were a huge hindrance to our walking with the Lord in holiness and obedience. Of course, the prime villain here was our sexual appetites.

Brand new Christians that we were, Jim and I had managed to fall into one of the oldest and most pervasive heresies in the church; the belief that the “spiritual” was good and the “physical”—especially our bodies and more especially our sexuality—were evil. There is a name for this heresy—Manichaenism—and it has shown up in all traditions throughout the history of the church. From causing the Catholic Church to paint loin clothes over some of Michelangelo’s nudes in the Sistine Chapel to the hesitancy to even mention sex in some current day conservative Protestant churches, over and over again the church has relegated the physical, and especially the body and sexuality, to the place where they are not discussed, and certainly not looked at.

The belief that the physical, especially the body, is bad is a heresy. It is a heresy because it denies the goodness of what God has created. God did create the material world—including our bodies—and He did declare them good. God made Adam a physical body—much like ours—and He declared it to be “very good”

This is a heresy, but it is an understandable one. The physical—our bodies and the appetites that are a part of our physical being—are the source of so much temptation and so much sin for so many people. As Christians our appetites seem always to be at war with the parts of us that long to be obedient and right in the sight of God.

This attitude, this heresy if you will, seems supported by the way “the flesh” is treated in Scripture. In the New Testament over and over again we are reminded that our flesh is at war with the Spirit within us. *To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace* (Romans 8:6). *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires* (Romans 13:14). *And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires* (Galatians 5:24). *...abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul* (1 Peter 2:11). *For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world* (1 John 2:16).

What is “the flesh” if not our bodies? How do we reconcile the idea that our bodies are “good” because God made them, with both our personal experiences of finding our bodies to be prime sources of sin in our lives and with the almost totally negative view of “the flesh” in Scripture?

The answer to this is vital if we are to form a vision for the sexual man we are to become. That man will not be a bodyless creature, not one who fulfills Jim’s and Alan’s desire to be free of these bodies. No, he will be a man who delights in all that God has created, including his own body. Our answer to questions about our bodies, like so many answers to life’s important questions lies in our understanding of the basics of our faith. So let us look at our bodies in light of our creation, the fall, and our redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ.

### **IN THE BEGINNING**

In the beginning God created a whole man. He was whole, not just because all of the necessary parts were there, but also because all of the parts worked in perfect harmony. Thus, what his body desired, his heart (his affections and emotions) wanted also, and so did his spirit (that part of him drawn to fellowship with and obedience to the Lord). Except perhaps for a small spark in him that would like to be more like God, there was never any conflict in this whole man. If he could look ahead at what Paul would one day write—*I do not understand my actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate* (Romans 7:15), he would have no idea of what Paul was talking about.

### **THE FALL**

But then Adam wanting “to be like God” (Genesis 3:5) disobeyed the one rule God had laid down for him. As a result, not only was Adam’s relationship with God broken, he himself became broken. What had been a wonderful whole, was suddenly at war with itself. It was as if Adam had become broken into pieces, his body, his mind, his heart, his spirit all started to draw him in different directions. His body would crave what his mind knew was harmful for him and what his spirit resisted. His heart would love what might harm his body and his spirit.

Nowhere was this brokenness more apparent than in his sexuality. Sexual desire, which was meant to flow out of love and be an expression of love for the one woman God had created for him, became a powerful free floating force of its own, demanding gratification with or without relationship, and often without regard for any of the terrible consequences that could follow. His mind might tell him that a certain sexual behavior would be disastrous for him, his spirit tell him that this will make him feel even more alienated from God, but still some part of him drove him on.

Adam, the whole man, had become a collection of warring parts, and this brokenness would be passed on to all his descendents, from the esteemed Christian leader who secretly employed male prostitutes to the young husband and father who dearly loved his family, but who with regularity would get up in the middle of the night to secretly revel in sexual images on his computer screen. Man had become powerless to reconcile his disparate parts.

## RESTORATION

But then hope came—in the person of God’s own Son. Through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, man could not only be reconciled to God, but could also be reconciled with himself. A man could be healed, made whole, and his parts once again work in perfect harmony.

This is the legitimate hope for every Christian believer. At the spiritual level it is an accomplished fact; we are reconciled with God, but in terms of this earthly life, it is a process; we are *being* restored and reconciled. The mind and the body and the spirit are coming together, but they are not there yet. The flesh and the spirit do still battle in us, in believers. Thus, what is referred to in the New Testament as “the flesh” is the bodily desires that have not yet been taken back by the Spirit. We crucify these desires so that they may be resurrected in their original good and life giving form.

The Spirit of God in us is battling to *take back*, not to destroy, our good bodies and their desires. We are on a journey towards that state in which all of our parts will again work in harmony with one another, a journey of reconciliation. In the area of our sexuality, the desires of the heart, the passions of the body, and the deep longings of the spirit are coming together, and when they do, we will be sexually whole men.

Will this happen in this lifetime? We do know that our bodies will not be fully restored in this life—they are still subject to disease and death, and we await the new bodies we will receive at the resurrection of the dead—but in other respects, how far each of us will go in this life towards the fulfillment of God’s perfect plan, it is impossible to say.

But this we can say, God’s plan is for our perfection and we are on a journey towards that perfection. This should excite each of us, for we are on a journey with God and His power is at work in us to bring us to perfection. Our job is to cooperate with Him in this endeavor, that in this life we may progress as far as we can towards complete wholeness, towards the perfection of our sexuality. The purpose of this book is to help you along on this journey.

## LOVING OUR BODIES

Because God’s creation is good and He loves it, we too should love it. Should we then love our bodies? In our narcissistic, body building, tanning salon, strutting, posing male culture, should we Christian men love our bodies? Isn’t loving our bodies an expression of pride and vanity?

Although there is only one reference to loving our bodies in Scripture, and it seems to be just a subsidiary comment to support a more important command, it cannot be ignored. *In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of His body* (Ephesians 5:28-30). Paul simply assumes that we love our bodies.

It is not difficult to make a case for the fact that men who obsessively try to improve their bodies through body building and other means, are revealing that they do not even like the body they have, much less love it.

I believe that I am a good one to illustrate the love of one's own body. Being a "seasoned citizen", skinny in my arms and legs, paunchy in my belly, growing all sorts of age spots and moles and hairs in the strangest places, having had a faulty heart valve replaced, a cancerous prostate removed, and living with a malfunctioning thyroid and a mild form of leukemia, I love my body! I love it because I love life, and it is through this old and sometimes weary body that I experience life.

It is this body that enables me to watch my grandchildren play, to hold my wife's hand, to feel the sun's warmth, to hear the birds sing, to enjoy the lilacs' fragrance, even to raise my hand to praise the wonderful One who gives me all of these precious gifts.

God gave us these bodies that we might experience His creation and *walk* with Him through our time on this earth.

Our bodies do give us problems. They malfunction at times, and they have a tendency to make wrongful demands, but they, including all that makes them manly and sexual, are a precious gift from God. Love them and work for their true perfection according to God's original plan.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR BODIES**

You are your body. Surely your body is not all that you are, but without your body, you would not be. In the words of Pope John Paul II, "The body expresses the person." Just as each person is unique, so each body is unique. We speak of "body language" because the way we carry and use the body expresses some of what is going on inside us. We see the person who walks tall and the person who slouches along as expressions of the interior person.

The modern world, shaped by materialism (the belief that the material world is all there is) separates the body from the person, or more commonly, denies the person altogether and sees only the body. And this body is simply a machine to be used and manipulated. Such thinking provides an easy justification for abortion and euthanasia. When the body is no longer useful, dispose of it. But as Christians, we see the person and the person cannot be separated from his body. The body is much more than a case in which we temporarily carry around our "real selves" while we are on this earth, only to cast it away when we go to be with the Lord.

Although the form will change, we will have bodies for eternity. When we die, for a time we will be just spirits joined with Jesus Christ. But this is not enough for God. When the final day comes, we will be resurrected with new bodies. Just as the creation of man—bodily man—was the culmination of creation, so shall our being raised with new bodies

represent the culmination of God's redemption of fallen creation through Jesus Christ. We will live eternally with our new bodies.

We love with our bodies. Our male bodies were created to be joined with a woman's body in an act of love and in the creation of new lives.

We worship with our bodies. *I appeal to you therefore brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (Romans 12:1). The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body (1 Corinthians 6:13). So glorify God in your bodies (1 Corinthians 6:20).*

But perhaps the importance and significance of the body is revealed most clearly by the fact that the Lord Himself took on a body like ours. *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14).* And He, like us, did not just take on our flesh for a defined time and purpose; He died in a body like ours, rose from the dead and ascended to heaven in that body, and today, He sits at the right hand of the Father in His body.

And to close the circle on the importance of the body, today, God dwells in our bodies. *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God (1 Corinthians 6:19).*

Men, in becoming the sexual men that God called them to be, will have to take on a higher view of the importance of their bodies. Your body is not like your car, a useful vehicle for getting around in for a while. No, your body is you, as much as your mind and your affections are you. What you do with it will matter tremendously, not just in the physical realm, but also as regards your eternal relationship with the One who designed it and made you steward of it.