

Your Body and the Game of LFTC

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

Feb 13, 2011

Last in a six-part series

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Genesis 1:26–31 (NRSV)

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

²⁷ So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” ²⁹ God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹ God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

1 Corinthians 6:12–20 (NRSV)

¹² “All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. ¹³ “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food,” and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, “The two shall be one flesh.” ¹⁷ But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. ¹⁸ Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰ For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

What does the Bible have to say about our bodies? Probably not what you think!

Sometimes the Bible just isn't what we want it to be. Perhaps we want a complete and well-organized textbook on Christian doctrine. The Bible certainly isn't that. Or maybe we want a manual that tells us exactly how God wants us to behave, a rule book of sorts. The Bible certainly isn't that either. Or perhaps all we want is a handy answer book. What happens to me in the moments after my death? Should I home-school my children? Should I make this deal to sell my business? The list is endless and everyone's is different. But the truth is that the Bible isn't a magic answer book either; it is not filled with the answers to all your questions if you can only figure out where and how to look.

Take today's topic for example. What does the Bible say to us about our physical life – our health, wellness, fitness, nutrition and so on? The truth is . . . not much really. The problem isn't that this topic is unimportant, just that it wasn't on the radar of people in the ancient world, from whom comes the entirety of the Bible. Here's a bit of important background:

- Most of the people in ancient Israel lived on subsistence diets. They didn't starve, but their life was not a struggle to avoid ingesting too many calories. Life was a struggle to eat enough calories to live. This is why so many of Jesus's images of God's kingdom revolve around abundant food.
- People didn't need to worry about fitness programs. They walked everywhere and worked hard. Many, particularly the rural poor, worked themselves into an early grave. Sedentary lives were the luxury of a few.

- Though people sought out physicians and healers of various sorts, the truth was there wasn't much they could do. No one knew that germs existed. Less than 200 years ago, people were still being bled to relieve illness. Anointing with oil was about as far as many so-called treatments could go.
- Life spans were short. Girls were married and pregnant by their mid-teens. Child-birth was hazardous to the mother and to the child. When Jesus began his public ministry at thirty, he was well into middle age. Yes, some people lived to a ripe old age, but not many. Life was just too hard and too dangerous.

Alas, we aren't going to find any passages in the Bible urging us toward regular exercise or a low-fat diet. So . . . do we simply move on to another topic? No! There is much about ourselves and our bodies that we get wrong; the Bible can help us to gain the right perspective even if it doesn't have answers to all of our questions.

Created whole

When God makes everything there is – planets, trees, dogs, humans – all of it is created “good” and all of it is created “whole.” We have two legs, a head, a liver, and teeth, but we are created as a unity, a single being, that walks and talks and thinks and loves. This may seem obvious, but not really.

Plato saw humans differently. Our bodies, he said, are imperfect vessels into which souls have fallen from the world of perfect forms (a heaven of sorts). Thus, our bodies are like prisons trapping our souls on earth until the time comes that the soul is released (our death) and can return upward to its true home, the place of the forms (heaven). If this seems eerily similar to the notions that many Christians carry around in their heads, you are on to something!

Thus, Plato saw humans as a duality – body and soul – with the soul being the “real me” and the body being no more than mere housing for the soul.

But this was not the perspective of the Jews. In their account of creation, Adam is the bodily image of the living God. Adam and Eve are created whole; there is nothing about a soul that falls into or otherwise inhabits a bag of bones. Instead, God breathes life into the dust of the earth (what a wondrously beautiful image) and humanity is created.

The body matters too!

When Paul wrote the letter that we know as 1 Corinthians to the Christians in Corinth, Greece, he was responding to a long list of problems that were presented to him. Many of the problems facing this young community of Jesus followers stemmed from what Paul saw as their “over-spiritualization.” They correctly understood that they had been born in the Spirit, as are all those who place their faith in Jesus Christ, but they allowed themselves to be too heavily influenced by Platonic ideas. They fully embraced and elevated their own spirit and all things spiritual and they set aside as unimportant all things having to do with their bodies. In essence, they split themselves in two – body and soul. Today's passage from 1 Corinthians 6 is a case in point.

The passage begins with some back and forth. Paul is quoting the Corinthians back to themselves and then rebutting their arguments. The translators of the NRSV show this by putting the Corinthian claims in quotations. There is some guesswork here as the Greeks didn't use quotation marks, but the gist of the give-and-take is clear. Paul is not going to have anything to do with their assertion that what they do with or to their bodies doesn't matter. Here is Richard Hays on this argument:

Paul insists, both here and in 1 Corinthians 15, that the body is created by God as a good part of creation and that God will redeem the body through resurrection. If Paul agreed (as in NRSV and NEB) with the slogan that “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food” and added that God would destroy both, he would be playing right into the hands of the Corinthian dualistic argument. The Corinthian *sophoi* [those who seem wise in worldly philosophies], seeing the body as transient and

trivial, have concluded that it makes no difference what we do with our bodies. If we are hungry, we should eat; if we are desirous of sexual gratification, we should seek it. None of this makes any difference, they say, because it concerns only external physical matters, which are of no lasting significance.¹

Though the Corinthians raise the issue around food, it is really sex that they are interested in. There were many temple prostitutes in ancient Corinth and some (many?) of these newly Christian men are using their services, believing that what they do with their bodies doesn't really matter; this Jesus-stuff is all about the spirit. What could the perfect Jesus have to do with very much imperfect flesh? Additionally, in Greco-Roman society there was no censuring of men who had sex outside marriage, so long as it wasn't with a married woman.

But Paul will have none of this. Don't they realize that they are all part of the body of Christ? How could you grasp that and think that bodies don't matter? We aren't divided in this way. We are whole persons – flesh, bones, soul, spirit – the whole package. We are redeemed by Christ as whole persons, every last inch and bit of us. Don't the Corinthians understand that when they have sex with a prostitute, they become “one flesh” with her (Genesis 2:26) and this bring her into the body; she who has not placed her faith in Jesus?

Don't the Corinthians grasp that they are indwelt by the very presence of God, his Spirit? Each of them is, thus, a temple of God. Just as the Spirit of God had once dwelt in the Jerusalem temple, so now, by virtue of Christ, God's Spirit dwells in each of them. The Corinthians can't think their “spirit” is right with God, making their bodies irrelevant. They have been wholly redeemed, they are now wholly in union with Christ, and they are now wholly the Lord's.

Here is Hays again:

Having emphatically asserted that God's raising of Jesus validates the physical body, Paul begins (6:15–17) to explore the implications of his statement that “the body is for the Lord.” This means that our bodies belong to the Lord Jesus. Those who are in Christ have been united with him in a relationship of intimate union (“one spirit with him,” v. 17) that is analogous to—but even deeper than—sexual union. (Note that Paul describes union with Christ in v. 17 with the same verb that he had used in v. 16 to describe union with a prostitute.) This means that our physical bodies no longer belong to us; they belong instead to Christ, in a manner analogous to the belonging of the bodies of husband and wife to one another (cf. 7:4; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22–33). The man who has sexual intercourse with a prostitute is therefore not only committing an act of infidelity to Christ but also taking something that belongs to Christ (his own body) and linking it to the sphere of the unholy. Contemplating this blasphemous prospect, Paul asks rhetorically, “Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?” (No one can ever accuse Paul of being a timid theological thinker; this is a bold metaphor carried through forcefully to its conclusion.) His response is an emphatic, “Never!”

Do our bodies matter? An emphatic YES! Not only did God create us, we belong to God. Every part of me is God's. The parts I use for thinking, for feeling, for eating, for walking – all of it. I belong to God!

And if I belong to God, then necessarily my body does. As with all else, I need to take this seriously. My body is God's and I have the responsibility to do all in my power to take care of it. Exercise, diet, health care. And more. I am to treat it with respect. I am to honor God's gift of embodiment. Here is Paul again: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.”

¹ Hays, R. B. (1997). *First Corinthians*. Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching (103). Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press. This commentary on 1 Corinthians is one of the best. A copy is in the St. Andrew library.

The Body Redeemed

From the Dictionary of Biblical Imagery:

The holistic view of “body” as the whole person, which permeates the Bible, makes for certain other implications for “body” as image. For it means that body becomes the place where we meet God and live out our service to him. It is the expression of our divinely given creatureliness, where obedience is practiced. And it is seen always therefore in relationship, with God and the fellow creatures with whom we share our corporeality, our “bodiness.”

It follows that redemption must be understood not as “from” the body but “of” it (Rom 8:23). Therefore even the future life is a bodily one. “In the body” in Paul’s writing usually means “earthly,” but there will be a God-given “heavenly” body (1 Cor 15:35–44; cf. Rom 8:11). Nonbodily resurrection is inconceivable to Paul. Equally, nonresurrection is inconceivable, since it is a participation in the resurrection body of the Lord Jesus. In 2 Corinthians 5:1–10 Paul makes a distinction not between “soul” and “body” but between our future resurrection bodies and the present mortal ones. In these present mortal bodies we will be questioned in the judgment, for it is where we do our living, believing, serving. Life after death is dependent on the gracious will and act of God through Christ Jesus, and our human appropriating of it. The reality of that appropriation is expressed by our life in the body (Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 6:14).

Hence the body image attracts the theme of sovereignty over the body, the sovereignty of God versus the sovereignty of sin. In Romans 6:12 Paul writes, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body” (NIV). God has broken the sovereignty of sin in our bodies because he has bought them back as his own possession, for they are now, through his sacrifice, Christ’s. Because Christ has given his own “body,” his total person, for them, they belong to him and he to them (1 Cor 6:13).

Hence, too, these same bodies will be made like Jesus’ “body of glory” (Phil 3:21), so the body, the total person, will itself be transformed. (This neither assumes nor denies the regrouping of the material substance of our bodies). The form of this body of “glory” cannot be surmised. What is certain is that it is in some way “like,” empowered by, the resurrection body of Christ.

Memory Verse of the Week

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.”

Leviticus 19:18b

This should look familiar. It is the second commandment from the Law of Moses that is quoted by Jesus when asked for the greatest commandment. For Jesus, this teaching is integral with the commandment to love the LORD God with all our heart, soul, and might. The natural question raised by this commandment is to ask “Who is my neighbor?” To which Jesus replies with the story of the Good Samaritan, who grasps that the person in need is his neighbor, irrespective of any social or economic barriers we raise.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

Here are some questions on the subject of our physical health posed by Rev. Arthur Jones:

1. How well do you take care of your body? How healthy do you think you are? How healthy do others think you are? You might ask yourselves these questions:
 - a. Do you exercise one hour every day?
 - b. Every other day?
 - c. Once a week?
2. Have you ever thought that if you only had a little more energy, you might be able to volunteer more? Have better relationships with your family? Have better relationships with God?
3. How is God calling you to take care of yourself? How is God calling you to use your body to take care of others who are unhealthy or sick?
4. Discuss ways you can get on (or stay on) a healthy track for your life and discuss who God might be calling you to help.

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Monday, 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5 Foolishness excludes boasting</p>	<p>Tuesday, 1 Corinthians 4:6-13 The puffed up Corinthians and the suffering apostle</p>
<p>Wednesday, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 The Lord's Supper: discerning the body</p>	<p>Thursday, 1 Corinthians 15:1-34 The resurrection constitutes the Gospel</p>
<p>Friday, 1 Corinthians 15:35-58 Resurrection means transformation of the body</p>	<p>Weekly Joys and Concerns</p>

