

How Do You View Your Body Image?

'May the God of peace Himself, sanctify you through and through (that is to make you pure and wholly consecrated to God); and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus our Messiah. Faithful and utterly trustworthy is He Who is calling you to Himself; and He will also fulfil His call by hallowing and keeping you' (1 Thessalonians 5:23 & 24).

What exactly is involved having our bodies being preserved blameless? Most of us don't consider our bodies very often but we all have to live in a body. The way people view their bodies is usually one of two extremes; one thought is to make their body an idol. They worship their body; cater to its every need; spend half their time thinking about what to do to please their body; what to eat or how to clothe it or how to adorn it. Then there is the other group of people who are at the opposite end, who view their body as a burden they have to drag around until they die. Neither thought is correct.

We can read how the Lord formed us after conception. 'For You did form my inward parts; You did knit me together in my mother's womb. I will confess and praise You for I am fearfully and wonderfully made! Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows that very well. My frame was not hidden from You when I was being formed in secret; intricately wrought in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance and in Your book all the days of my life were written, before ever they took shape, when as yet there was none of them' (Psalm 139:13 to 16).

The Spirit of the Lord enters an unborn baby within the womb. 'As you know not, what is the way of the wind, nor how the Spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a pregnant woman, even so you know not the work of God Who does all' (Ecclesiastes 11:5).

We need to see that we are all wonderfully made and we need to let that knowledge go down deep into our soul. Do we really understand how intricately our bodies are woven together? King David knew through a revelation that the human body is a created miracle of God. We can understand the same thing through advances in science but even then, we need to know we are personally responsible for the keeping our own body.

Here are a few simple facts about the body. Millions of light sensitive nerve cells in the back of each eye, relay the information to our brain through a bundle of nerve fibres that form the optic nerve. Our brain analyses this information and as a result, we can see. The whole process takes just a fraction of a second. The lens focuses light onto the retina – the back wall of the eye – and to focus, the lens changes shape. In a single day, our lens may change shape 100,000 times.

Compared to other animals (not that we are animals, but just as a comparison) we have a large brain for our body. The grey part of the brain is folded to fit inside our skull. Flattened out, it would cover a small dining table. We have approximately 37,500 kilometres or 60,000 miles of blood vessels inside our bodies; nearly enough to stretch 2½ times around the earth.

We have about 5,000,000 hairs on our bodies but only about 100,000 on our heads, and God has counted every one of them (Matthew 10:30; Luke 12:7). Most of the cells that make up our organs are so small, that 200 of them could fit on a full stop, and we have about one trillion cells inside our bodies. About 31 kilometres or 50 miles of nerves, snake through our body like a network of telephone wires and they relay messages to our body, spinal cord and brain.

The place of the body in regards to redemption has a very important position. In the whole book of Romans we read all about God's marvellous plan of redemption and salvation through faith, our role as Christians and how to get along with one another, both in our physical bodies and in the Body of Believers. How should we respond to the instructions in Romans? We are told to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service. The very first thing

we do, as soon as we accept Jesus as our Saviour, is to present our bodies. We must not think that our spirit and soul are more important than the body; for the body is equally important to God. If we give God our body, the spirit and soul come with it as a complete package. Then God goes on to say; 'Don't be conformed to this age but be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may find the perfect and acceptable will of God' (Romans 12:1 & 2).

What we do in our body, tells Him how much we have appropriated His will. If we don't present our body to Him, we are not in a situation to find out His will for our life. To find out God's will for our life, we need to meet His conditions. We need to present our body, then God will renew our mind and we will end up knowing God's will for our life and we will develop the mind (the thoughts, hearts desires, purposes, aims) of our Messiah (1 Corinthians 2:16). God wants to know what we are doing in the body. When the Apostle Paul said to present our body as a living sacrifice, he was referring to the Old Testament law. According to the law, a man would present his sacrificial animal to be sacrificed. Once it had been slain, it no longer belonged to the man – it belonged to God. We are to do the same but we are to give ourselves as a living sacrifice. Once we have presented ourselves, we no longer belong to ourselves, we belong to God. It is no longer we who live, but Jesus Who lives in us (Galatians 2:20). Once we have given God our body, we don't own it any more. We are a steward and we will have to answer to God for the way we have treated your body. 'For we must all appear before the Judgement Seat of Jesus, so that each one may receive according to what he has done in the body, whether good or bad' (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Remember this: whatever is not good is bad; there is no in between. This is not the final judgement of unbelievers. It is the judgement of believer's works, whether good or bad. These are the rewards to be given out, not judgement for sin. To be free of judgement, we must be willing to confess our sins to God. God is faithful to forgive us, but we must first confess our sins (1 John 1:9). Or in other words, we must take responsibility for our own sin and ask God's forgiveness. We should make a practice of confessing our sins regularly so we can habitually walk in the forgiveness of God. 'Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit Who lives within you, Whom you have received as a Gift from God? You are not your own. You were bought with a price. So then honour and glorify God in your body and in your Spirit, which are God's' (1 Corinthians 6:19 & 20). In this scripture, we see that our body is a temple. How do we treat a sacred temple? Do we treat it casually? No. It is God's temple and we must treat our bodies with respect. One day we will have a new resurrected body. 'We are citizens of heaven and we earnestly await the coming of the Lord Jesus our Messiah and Saviour, Who will transform anew the body of our humiliation to be like the body of His glory and majesty' (Philippians 3:20 & 21).

The transformation will be instant and will last forever. The body we live in today is a body of humiliation; a fallen body in a fallen world. We are humiliated because of our sin and by the things our bodies have to do. For example, we perspire and must wash to remove body odour; we must use the bathroom; our hair falls out; our teeth fall out; women lose their dignity when giving birth; we become old and feeble. We are simple creatures and are paying the price for Adam's sin which became our sin. Thank God that is not the end! We are going to receive a glorious body; a body of glory like the body of the resurrected Jesus. Our bodies have a wonderful destiny.

Our aim should be to attain the resurrection just as Paul did when he wrote the book of Philippians. He said it was a priceless privilege and a supreme advantage to know the Lord Jesus. We must live in such a way that we can partake of the things of heaven. Paul did not take his salvation for granted and we can not take our salvation for granted. We must work on our relationship with the Lord and remain in sweet fellowship with Him daily. He can keep us from falling (Jude 24), but we must hold tight to that which is promised, which is eternal life.

Paul says he treated his body with discipline to subdue it; 'For fear that after proclaiming the gospel to others, I would become unfit and be disqualified' (1 Corinthians 9:27). He knew he had to work on his relationship with God so he would not be disqualified and lose his salvation. We need to have

respect for our bodies and not abuse it. One way to respect our body is to watch what we eat, drink and ingest. Here are just three evils we should abstain from. Alcohol, cigarettes and gluttony. Alcohol should never be consumed by a Christian for three reasons; firstly - because we could make a new Christian stumble. If there is a new baby Christian in your church, who was once an alcoholic and was wonderfully saved and delivered, then we offer that person an alcoholic drink, we could make that person fall away from God and lose his salvation. We would then be held accountable to God and the scripture says it would be better for us to have a millstone tied around our neck and thrown into the sea if we make a child or a young Christian stumble (Matthew 18:6 & 7; Mark 9:42 & Luke 17:1 & 2). The second reason a Christian should not touch alcohol, it could get us hooked and 'disqualify' us or send us off to hell. To drink alcohol is to live as an enemy of the cross because we would be siding with earthly things and being a party to the same sin. See the frightening scripture; especially verse 19: 'They are doomed and their fate is eternal misery; their god is their stomach and they glory in their shame, siding with earthly things and being of their party' (Philippians 3:14 to 21). The third reason not to indulge in alcohol, is it is a bad witness and we will not be an effective witness if we are conforming ourself to the world by drinking alcohol. Abstinence is the best witness. 'Abstain from every form of evil' (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

No Christian should ever smoke any type of cigarette. If you are a Christian and you smoke, you are a bad witness to the people around you and you could cause them to stumble. It would be best to give it up. Smoking is illogical, stupid and a bad witness. Why? Because of the disease-causing chemicals in each cigarette. If we saw a young child about to drink a cocktail of rat poison, brake fluid and sticky tar, we would not hesitate to remove the substance from the child. Yet adults, who should know better, ingest those types of chemicals every time they light up. How stupid is that? Then when they develop cancer, emphysema or diabetes, they do all they can to rid themselves of the disease and prolong their lives. Not logical is it? How can that possibly be a good witness to the unsaved who could end up in hell? Christians who smoke, Christians who drink alcohol and those Christians who take illegal drugs think more of themselves that they do of the lost souls they should be trying to save, and will have to answer to God for their behaviour plus give an account for the people they have caused to stumble. We need to crucify our lust of the flesh, stop conforming to the world and behave in such a manner, we will really be the salt of the earth, bringing glory and honour to God the Father.

What we eat is just as important. Overeating – which the Bible calls gluttony – is sin. 'He is a drunkard and a glutton. Then all the men of his city should stone him to death; so you shall cleanse out the evil from your midst' (Deuteronomy 21:20 & 21). See that? Eating to excess is considered evil in the Lord's eyes. 'So then, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all for the honour and glory of God. Do not give any occasion that will cause stumbling or offence to the Jews or to the Gentiles or to the church of God' (1 Corinthians 10:31 & 32). We need to eat or drink and behave in a way that brings honour to God and does not cause a person to stumble in their faith. We have already mentioned the millstone! Drinking alcohol may cause a person to stumble, and that will not bring glory to God. Smoking does not honour God. Eating ourself into an early grave, does not bring honour to God. We need to be sure, whatever we do, brings honour to God. We must abstain from every form of evil.

Parents are responsible for their children's eating habits and should teach their children about nutrition. It's their duty as parents. Sometimes children never recover from the bad habits taught to them by their parents and in turn go to an early grave. Christian parents sometimes forget their children's bodies are also a temple of the Holy Spirit and must be treated with respect. We need to be careful what we feed our children; and be careful how we treat our children. Parents should set a Godly example for their children which in turn will honour God.

One quirk of human nature is to deny the possibility of serious illness until it occurs. For example: how many people only stop smoking after they have been diagnosed with cancer? Once illness occurs, we will do and pay almost anything to repair our bodies. Prevention is easier, cheaper and

much less stressful. Good health doesn't cost much but ill health can cost a lot. We need to take care of the whole person; that is the body, soul and spirit and not just the soul. Most certainly God can heal the body, but we need to be good stewards and keep the body clean and healthy. If our diets are all wrong and we suffer from illness, then we need to do something about it ourselves. God won't do what we can do for ourselves. God will step in and heal when there is nothing more we can do. He will help us for sure, but we must make the decision to change the way we do things first and He will meet us half way.

Some questions for our menfolk. Do you take better care of your vehicle than of your body? Do you know more, what to put into your car than into your body? Do you pay for a mechanic to repair your car before you fix your own body? If your vehicle wears out, as it will over time, you can replace it with another one, but you can't replace your body. Even if your house burns down, it can be rebuilt better than before, but you can't rebuild your body. However, dieting on its own is not a remedy. There is only one suitable remedy and that is to change your whole life-style. Do you think that the people who sell fast foods are more interested in your health or your money? They are not concerned about doing you good; they care only about how much money you will give them and how often. A large part of the advertising industry is devoted to parting you from your money.

Excessive food intake or in fact anything that is not bringing glory to God is to be put to one side and we must focus our whole heart and soul on the Lord and the things of the Spirit. 'Set your minds on what is above and not on the things that are on the earth' (Colossians 3:2). 'If we who are abiding in Jesus, have hope only in this life and that is all, then we are of all people most miserable and to be pitied' (1 Corinthians 15:19). See that? If we are a Christian and indulge ourself with the earthly things (called lust of the flesh), then we are to be pitied! Why? Read Philippians 3:15 to 21 again. We need to look to God and to eternity as citizens of heaven, and not satisfy the longings of the flesh. If all we can see is the concerns of this life; food, drink, houses, cars, marriage, children etc then Paul says we will be miserable and are to be pitied. We need to change our spiritual condition. See what we can do once again in Romans 12. We need to present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice to Him; hand our body over to God and put it on His 'altar'. It no longer belongs to us. We need to deny ourself and we will be asked to give an account to God for the way we have treated our body. It's God's temple. It must be kept pure and holy. 'If the Spirit of Him Who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then He Who raised up Jesus from the dead will also restore to life your mortal bodies through His Spirit Who dwells in you. So then we are debtors, but not to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will surely die; but as many as are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God' (Romans 8:11 to 13). 'I say walk in the Spirit then you will not gratify the flesh for the flesh is opposed to the Spirit, and the Spirit is opposed to the flesh. They are antagonistic to each other' (Galatians 5:16 & 17). We as Holy Spirit-filled Christians, have two opposing forces within us and they battle against one another. We have the pure Holy Spirit and we have the old carnal nature, so whenever we yield to the Holy Spirit, we are denying the flesh and when we give in to the flesh, we need to repent. It is a constant battle but yielding to the Holy Spirit reaps eternal rewards; whereas yielding to the flesh may bring momentary pleasure but afterwards comes the uneasy sense of conviction which will only go once the sin has been confessed and we are clean once more. If we gratify the flesh, we are in effect, snubbing the Holy Spirit. We can't have life both ways. We have to make our mind up. Giving in to the flesh is not the perfect and acceptable will of God.

Young people sometimes have a very poor self-image. They try to forget their unhappiness by taking drugs, starve themselves, force themselves to throw up, wear their hair over their faces, cover their faces with caps, wear heavy make up, try to 'improve' themselves by having tattoos or other piercings done or grow a full beard. All they are doing is covering themselves up and the more they cover up, the more they are exposing the sad truth about themselves. Most young people think that by having many sexual partners they will find 'love' but they never will find the love they are looking for that way. How can a teenager deal with poor self-image and feel accepted? Present your bodies to the Lord as a living sacrifice, then develop a prayer life, fellowship with other Christians your age, read the Bible, listen to Christian music and attend church. In time, as God gently takes charge, so you will see that

He loves you; you too are wonderfully made. There is no need to have many sexual partners. You will find the love and acceptance you desperately crave by accepting God's holy love. Remember that there is no sin too terrible for God to forgive. If you are troubled by some secret sin that you are too embarrassed to tell anyone about – you can tell God. You can't shock Him; He knows about it already and if you confess your sin to Him, He will forgive you. Ask God to help you to give up smoking, alcohol and drugs. Get a good haircut, tidy the beard, wear more acceptable clothing, stop listening to rock music – it is usually evil. Remove all your studs and do not get tattooed. Shaving the sides of your head (like a 'mohawk'), having a 'goatee' beard, tattoos and many piercings are sinful because they are signs of rebellion and idolatry, so you will need to get rid of them and grow that rebellious hair style out (Leviticus 19:27 & 28). The goatee beard is evil in the sight of God because the ancient peoples worshipped the goat god or idol, and God's people are forbidden to do that (Leviticus 17:7). After all that, look at yourself in the mirror, smile and be proud of yourself. You are God's child, He loves you; you are chosen. The closer you get to God, the more your self-image will improve. He is the King of all kings and the Lord of all lords and since you are now His child, that makes you a young prince or princess in the Kingdom of God. You're special to Him and accepted by Him. 'I do not write these things to shame you, but to warn you and counsel you as beloved children' (1 Corinthians 4:14). 'Be imitators of God, as beloved children' (Ephesians 5:1). You are 'Accepted in the beloved' (Ephesians 1:6).

Imagine this scenario: There is a major competition on and unsure of your own worth or abilities, you decide to enter. While waiting and hoping to be selected, a person comes up to you and says to you, "Congratulations Young Person. From thousands of applicants, you have been chosen as a winner of this competition and in time, you will marry The King of kings." How good is that! But that is exactly what you are and will be. As Christians, we will all, in time, be part of the Bride of our Messiah, but for now, we are to be His faithful servants on earth, doing good and bringing Him glory and honour.

These topics are almost never talked about in churches – that is why we have decided to write this text. It is a reproach to the wider church that we don't face these issues more often because many people don't know these things and they need to learn. Many young people don't even know what high fibre foods are much less why they must eat them. One simple prayer should be prayed every day; "Thank you for our daily bread, and now O Lord, help us to eat wisely." That simple prayer could change your life and as the Lord answers, so He will guide you to better eating habits. Not instantly, but little step by little step. 'Beloved. I pray that you may prosper and be in good health, even as your soul prospers' (3 John 1:2).

Amen and God bless you.

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