

OUR BODIES IN SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION III

Romans 8:5-8

INTRODUCTION

In His most famous sermon, Jesus said this:

Matthew 6:25 (ESV)

²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”

Now this is a very relevant point as we continue to think about our physical bodies as they relate to the overall process of becoming like Jesus. According to Dallas Willard...

Dallas Willard

For usual human beings in the usual circumstances, their body runs their life. Contrary to the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:25, life is, for them, not more than food, nor the body more than clothing. As a matter of simple fact, their time and energy is almost wholly, if not entirely, devoted to how their body looks, smells, and feels, and to how it can be secured and used to meet ego needs such as admiration, sexual gratification, and power over others.¹

I can't help but think that this describes not only those who are not followers of Christ, but it describes many of us who are followers of Jesus. Here's a simple test: how much time, on average, do we devote to the maintenance and well-being of our physical bodies compared to the average amount of time we dedicate to our spiritual growth and well-being?

Our culture is obsessed with the physical body. And we are formed in large measure by our culture. It is this obsession that drives the sexualization of practically everything. It is our obsession with the physical body that drives abortion and eating disorders and violence on school campuses.

Think with me about what happens on our middle school and high school campuses every day. Obsession with our bodies causes tremendous internal and social turmoil, everyday, for our kids when they go to school. The cute girls get the attention of the buff guys while the chubby girls and pimply guys seethe inside with jealousy and hatred. This divide over physical appearance and sex appeal consumes the minds, feelings and energy of our young people. And for the majority it carries right on in to our adult lives.

It is our obsession with our physical bodies that drives our health care industry and the amount of energy we expend in trying to hold back the aging process. Our anxiety over gray hair, wrinkles and decreasing libido drives multi million dollar industries of hair and skin products and drugs to enhance sexual performance.

Perhaps you've seen the commercial with the man in the elevator thinking about his graying hair and the possibility that his career might be at an end because his gray hair makes him look older. In the next sequence, his hair is silky black and he's surrounded by encouraging coworkers working together. Message: your hair color is the key to a

¹ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), p.168.

long lasting career. Makes you wonder if personal character has anything to do with a successful career.

For all the money, time and energy we expend on strengthening and beautifying our bodies, our bodies still grow old and wrinkly and feeble and fat and finally die. It is the ultimate irony – our bodies ultimately betray us. So you have to wonder if it's worth it to make our bodies the focus of our lives.

Now let me be clear; our bodies are not the problem, it's our character that's the problem. Our bodies were created good and through Jesus our bodies can progressively be restored to goodness. The point is that the body was never meant to be the focus of our existence. Our bodies are instruments through which we are to relate to God and to others for good. Our bodies are meant to be our servants through which we accomplish God's will in this world. Our bodies were never meant to be our masters. Our bodies were not made to run our lives. When our bodies run our lives conflict and frustration are the result.

Through the Apostle Paul, God speaks to us about our obsession with our physical bodies in order to lead us out of this obsession. Think about how true to life these words are that we find in Romans 8:1-8:

Romans 8:1-8

¹There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶**To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.** ⁷For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

We need to keep in mind that in Romans chapter 8, the Apostle Paul is answering the question he raised in Romans 7:24:

Romans 7:24

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

To be delivered from "this body of death" in this context is to be delivered from the control of the sin embedded in my body.

The first part of his answer is given in verses 1-4 of chapter eight:

Romans 8:1-4

¹There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

We discovered that as we struggle to be delivered from the control of our bodies:

(8:1) God does not condemn us for experiencing this struggle.

and

(8:2-4) Because Christ died for us and the Holy Spirit now lives in us, the control of our physical bodies over our lives has been broken.

Through Jesus we are reconciled to God and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Through the living presence of the Holy Spirit we now have a whole new set of options we did not have before Christ. I love how Dallas Willard expresses this new situation for Christians:

Dallas Willard

Because we are in the grip of grace, sin does not exercise control over us except insofar as we allow it. And, with divine assistance provided, we can break whatever strict control remains to it in every aspect of our life...²

Now it's easy to claim that we no longer have to be controlled by our bodies or rather the sin that is embedded in our various body parts, but it's quite another thing entirely to live this out. The question is how do we practically tap into the grace and power of the Holy Spirit to break out of long term, self centered behavior that has become embedded in our bodies?

Let's continue in our study of Romans 8.

Romans 8:5-8

⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

What strikes us immediately is that the physical lives we live are tied directly to the orientation of our minds. This is completely in line with what we have studied about character formation. Our minds, which are composed of our thoughts and feelings, direct the choices we make with our hearts which in turn forms our character.

Simply put; **in order for our bodies to become our servants and no longer our masters, we must keep our minds focused on our nature as spiritual beings rather than merely physical beings.**

What does it mean to set our minds on the flesh? The Apostle John helps us here in 1 John 2:16:

1 John 2:16

¹⁶For 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.

² Ibid., p.165.

What does it mean to set our minds on the things of the Spirit? Let's read Colossians 3:1-4:

Colossians 3:1-4

¹If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

To say it another way, because our identity is now bound up with Jesus our minds need to be focused on what is important to Him. The things that are important to Jesus will be the only things that matter when He comes again.

Setting my mind on the things of the Spirit leads to a completely different orientation of life. No longer is everything evaluated according to how it makes me feel or how it makes me look to others or how I can go about getting my way. That is the life of the flesh and that leads to constant conflict, frustration and death.

Setting my mind on the things of the Spirit leads to a completely different orientation of life. Now, each and every situation is evaluated according to its potential to teach and train me in the life of Christ, or the opportunity to serve and impact another person positively for Christ. This is to live according to the Spirit. Living for God is an adventure. Living for God fills our lives with interesting people and challenging situations that keep our relationship with God vibrant and essential. It is life and peace.

This is how Jesus Christ, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, *delivers us from this body of death.*

How practically do we set our minds on the things of the Spirit? To begin with, God's Word must constantly be filling our minds. There simply is no substitute, no short cut to this absolute necessity that we be in God's Word and God's Word be in our thoughts. In addition to God's Word being on our minds, the Scriptures tells us that:

Philippians 4:8-9

⁸...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

This really opens up the entire world of knowledge and human experience for us to think about. Art, literature, the sciences, law, philosophy, engineering, medicine, history all contain elements that are true, honorable, lead to justice, are beautiful and commendable. Our minds are to be occupied with integrating all of these areas of study and discovery with God's revelation. *Love Your God With All Your Mind* by J.P. Moreland is a very helpful treatment of this topic.

CONCLUSION

God the Father has delivered us from the control of our bodies and the sin embedded in our bodies by first condemning and punishing sin through the blood sacrifice of Jesus and second by giving the Holy Spirit to indwell our bodies. Our part in being delivered from the control of our bodies is to continually focus our minds on the fact that we are spiritual beings living God's life through our physical bodies.