

Weekly Newsletter: 20th February 2024

Reflection: Your Body Is Not Your Own

By Joe Barnard

Paul's sentences are often like a display cabinet holding multiple precious objects. On the one hand, you can look at a whole sentence and be struck by the elegance and profundity of its main idea. On the other, you can pull out single words or phrases that are remarkable for their theological richness, density, and variety of applications.

An example of the latter is the short phrase "to dishonour their bodies", which is found in Romans 1:24. This phrase disrupts a prevalent mode of thinking regarding the human body in the modern world. To ponder this phrase is to be given a new window to look through to understand what it means to be morally responsible as a human being.

Let me explain what I mean by this. In the 21st century, we tend to think that the body is a "thing" that is detached from the true self. The real me is not the embodied me, but something immaterial that is "inside" of the body. We are the ghost in the machine, as one famous philosopher put the matter. This mindset affects not just unbelievers but believers. Clear evidence of this is how comfortable a lot of us are to picture eternal life in a condition completely free of embodied existence.

Equally, modern people tend to imagine the body to be a personal possession over which an individual has freedom and autonomy. Accordingly, a lot of us feel as if we can do what we want to our bodies. Rather than the body having intrinsic dignity which must be acknowledged and respected, the body is a tool to be used for pleasure and comfort – at times a pack-mule to be worked relentlessly without rest, at other times a pet to be pampered, and at other times a plastic substance to be reshaped for creative self-expression. We can abuse the body, ignore the body, or alter the body without any feeling of transgressing a limit or dishonouring something sacred.

Paul's understanding of the body is a universe apart from ours. First, Paul would reject any mode of thinking that reduces the body to a mere "thing" that is separable from the real "me". His worldview is rooted in his Hebraic understanding of the human person. From Genesis on, the body and the self are a single entity. Whereas angels may have a soul without a material body and animals may have a body without a reasonable soul, human beings are amphibious. We are the curious creature who combines the natures of an angel and a beast in a novel existence. This is why resurrection is essential to our hope. Our humanity requires that we not just have a mind to contemplate but feet to stand on. Without bodies, we are not ourselves. We are made to dance, eat, and sing, not just reflect, admire, and adore.

But second, Paul would also contest any attitude that treated the body as a private possession over which the self is autonomous. We see this in Paul's warning against dishonouring the body in Romans 1:24. In Paul's mind, the body is a gift, something to be received with both gratitude and a sense of responsibility. There is an 'otherness' of one's own body that must always be respected. As in a marriage, in which one spouse is bound to another without having a right of possession, the soul is wedded to the body in a relationship of duty, not of ownership. My body is not "mine" in the sense that I can do with it whatever I want. Rather, my body is "mine" as a beloved is mine. God has summoned me to look after, to care for, and to honour my body as something that He has made and entrusted to me.

What does it practically look like to treat the body with respect and love? Here are some suggestions to consider.

First, we ought to be grateful for the specific body that God has given us. This may be hard for some of us. Many Christians look at their bodies and are frustrated – at times disgusted – by what they see. Such shortsightedness needs to be corrected. Paul is clear that the current body is just a seed yet to be sown. On resurrection day, the gnarly husk of this mortal body will burst into something incorruptible, glorious, and powerful (c.f. I Cor. 15:42ff). From the soil of death, a rose will blossom - and the more difficult our suffering has been, the more magnificent will be the flower.

Second, we need to make sure that sinful passions are not allowed to hold the reins of the body. To act on gluttony, or sloth, or envy, or anger is not just a sin against God, but a sin against the body. Our bodies were not made to be instruments of sin, but instruments of righteousness. To use the body for sin is like using a candlestick for a weapon. It is a betrayal of design.

Third, the last point can be flipped from a negative statement to a positive one. We need to allow the Spirit of God to hold reins of the body. I never cease to be amazed by Paul's statements that the body is the temple of God and that the Spirit of God indwells the body (I Cor. 6:19-20). Acknowledging this should silence forever the thought that "my body is mine". The whole of our persons exists by God and for God. Recognising this, we need to be willing to yield our bodies absolutely to the rule of Christ. As our minds belong to Christ, and our hearts, so do our bodies.

Finally, re-appraising the body ought to inspire us to think deeply about a wide variety of topics. From abortion to assisted suicide, from sexual identity to funeral rites, a theology of the body is essential to responsible Christian witness. Much rigorous thought will be needed to figure out the multiple implications of Paul's striking statement: "For you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body" (I Cor. 6:20).

The Sorsamos Visit

The Sorsamos are one of the families that we support as a church and they are visiting Edinburgh from Wednesday this week (21st) until Tuesday next week (27th). Hazel is a member at Holyrood and worshipped with us as a student. She's married to Hannu and they have served in Africa and the Middle East doing Bible translation work with Wycliffe. They now live in Finland and have four children - Cameron, Molly, Isabel and Robert. They'll be with us on Sunday and it will be great to see them again. If you've never met them before, take this opportunity to say hello to them in person!



Prayer Meeting – Wednesday @ 7pm on Zoom

At our prayer meeting this week, Lorna MacDonald (Acting Head of Tearfund Scotland) will be joining us to share about the incredible things God is doing in some of the poorest parts of the world. We're meeting on Zoom at 7pm. Contact Liz@holyroodevangelical.org if you would like to receive the Zoom codes.

Home Group – Sunday @ 6pm

As a follow up to Hope Explored, the Home Group that meets in the church will be starting [the Speak Life 321 Course](#). This course is designed to help us think about God, the world and ourselves and is for anyone who has questions about life, meaning and purpose. If this interests you, come along to the church at 6pm and bring a friend! For more information, contact Liz@holyroodevangelical.org

HEC WhatsApp Group

Did you know that we have a WhatsApp group as a church family? It is used to share church news, prayer requests, new songs we'll be singing, to celebrate birthdays and much more! Contact Norma (ship-pins@sky.com) if you would like to join the group.

Warm Space Needs You!

We need more volunteers for our Warm Space teams. Warm Space takes place in the church building from 12 noon until 3pm each Monday and we need people to chat to members of the public, serve tea and coffee and invite people in who are passing by. For more information, contact Bill (williamwright@hotmail.co.uk)

Men's Discipleship at HEC

In the next session of men's discipleship we will finish going through the Gospel Coalition Statement of Faith, which is the statement of faith used by HEC. As usual, there will be two options for men to choose from, one in-person and one on Zoom. Here the details:

- **Tuesdays at 6:30am** on Zoom. Start date Feb. 20th (message Joe if you would like the Zoom link)
- **Thursdays at 11am** in church. Start date Feb. 22nd
- Both groups will meet for 6 consecutive weeks and end before Easter

Women's Discipleship at HEC

It is a joy to get together as women to study God's word, pray and share fellowship. Join us for-

- **Bible studies (on Zoom) on Tuesday evenings from 7-8pm**. We'll be looking at the next section in Navigating Gospel Truth by Rebecca McLaughlin. There's no prereading or homework to do and we'll run for six weeks until 19th March. Contact Liz@holyroodevangelical.org for more details.
- Our next **Ladies Breakfast** will be on Saturday 2nd March at 9.30am. Our speaker will be Amy Wicks

from St Silas Church in Glasgow. More details to follow.

- Our **in person Bible studies** will be starting on **Thursday 25th April at 11am** and will run for a six week block, finishing on 30th May. We're meeting in the church and scones will be provided!

CARE's Protect Life Tour



On **Thursday, 7th March** at 7.30pm, we're hosting CARE's Protect Life event in Edinburgh. The new assisted suicide legislation will soon be debated at Holyrood. At this event we will consider a theological and medical response and provide tips on political engagement.

Tea and coffee will be served afterwards and everyone is warmly invited to attend.

Biblical Fatherhood Conference

On **Saturday 23rd March** from 9.30am to 3.30pm, we're hosting a day to be equipped, challenged and encouraged in the God given calling of fatherhood. Joe is speaking at this event along with Andy Murray, Kevin Wong and Adri Van Den Broek.

For tickets and more information go [here](#).



Church Calendar

- Tuesday:
 - Men's Discipleship at 6.30am on Zoom
 - Pickleball and Table Tennis at 7pm in the church
 - Women's Bible Study at 7pm on Zoom
- Wednesday: Prayer meeting at 7pm on Zoom
- Thursday:
 - Men's Discipleship at 11am in person
 - Session meeting at 7pm in person
- Sunday:
 - Worship Service at 10.30am (and live streamed). Joe Barnard preaching.
 - Home Groups
- Monday:
 - Baby and Toddler Group from 10am – 11.30am
 - Warm Space from 12noon - 3pm
 - Co-ordination Group on Zoom from 7-8pm



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