

THE REAL YOU

One of the rabbis used to say that everyone should carry two pieces of paper in their pockets. One to take out and read, when feeling important and self-satisfied, that says, “I am only dust and ashes.” The other to take out and read, when discouraged and troubled, that says, “For my sake the world was created.” This illustrates nicely what is said about us as created beings in Psalm 8.1, 3-6, 9:

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?
Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet.

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!¹

What is man?² Scripture teaches us that man is body; he is dust and ashes, a part of the material creation. Scripture also teaches us that man is spirit; he is “image of God” and thereby exercises dominion over the created world. Man does not simply “have a body.” Man is body. Contrast this with Greek thought. Ancient Greeks believed in the dualism of matter and spirit, and this implied that man can be distinguished from his body. For example, Heraclitus of

¹All Scripture quotations unless indicated otherwise are from the *English Standard Version* (2001).

²Unless so noted by context, the English word “man” throughout, as with Hebrew and Greek equivalents in the Bible, is used in a generic sense and not to indicate gender. For biblical terminology, see S. V. McCasland, “Man, nature of, in the NT,” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Volume 3, edited by George Arthur Buttrick (Abingdon, 1962), 246-250.

Ephesus said, “Without the soul, the body is worse than dung and should be cast aside with no solemn burial.” And Euripides of Salamis said, “The lot of the *soma* [“body”] has fallen to man, the body is his fetter.” The idea is that the *soma* is the tomb (Greek *sema*) of the soul.

In contrast, according to the Bible, the body is an integral, necessary part of man’s total being. The body is not inherently evil, although it can be the instrument of evil (e.g., “the works of the flesh”; Galatians 5.19-21). In biblical thought, the body is good, even very good (see Genesis 1.31; 2.7). And according to Genesis 2.22-23, the female (i.e., woman) is fashioned from the *body* of the male (i.e., man). The joining of two as “one flesh” (i.e., physical as well as spiritual union) is holy (Genesis 2.24; cf. Hebrews 13.4). In their state of innocence, male (i.e., man) and female (i.e., woman) were naked and not ashamed (Genesis 2.25).

In biblical thought, the body is not a temporary garment which may be laid aside. God created man as body and spirit—one essential unity. Sin, not God, brought about the division of body and spirit in death. The apostle Paul says, “Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin” (Romans 5.12). And the verdict pronounced by God for sin is, “You are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3.19). God did not intend originally for body and spirit to be separated. So to remedy this he provides redemption in Jesus. Peter tells us, “You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1.18-19; NKJV). And this redemption includes “the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8.23). Paul says, “For our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” (Philippians 3.20-21). Man is body.

But man is also spirit. Just as the body is created by God, the human spirit is created by God. Ecclesiastes 12.7 states, “The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to

God who gave it.” In Hebrews 12.9, God is called “the Father of spirits.” Of course, man’s spiritual nature is different from although united with his material nature (e.g., “soul and body” in Psalm 31.9; Isaiah 10.18). This is why, in the days of Noah, the Lord could say, “My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh” (Genesis 6.3). And it is this spiritual nature of man that differentiates humans from animals. The spirit of man is created in “the image of God” (Genesis 1.27). So man is body, but man is also spirit. And the two can be separated (see 2 Corinthians 12.2-4). Death, which is unnatural, is the result of such separation (James 2.26; cf. Matthew 10.28).

This relation of spirit to body, their essential unity and possible separation, defines three comparative states for each of us as believers in Christ. *Good* is the here and now. We live in hope. We live now in joy, peace, and patience. Paul writes:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Romans 5.1-5).

Yes, we endure pain and suffering in our bodies and in our spirits. The outward man (i.e., body) is perishing. Our present bodies, that are fashioned after Adam’s, are weak, mortal, dishonored, and perishable. But our present bodies are *seed*! This is what Paul notes when he talks about the resurrection. “So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15.42-44). The body “is sown” in death, and the body “is raised” in resurrection. “So we do not lose heart,” says the apostle, “though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by

day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4.16-18). *Good* is the here and now.

Better, however, is the laying aside or “putting off” of our earthly dwelling or tent (e.g., the body; see 2 Peter 1.14). Though death is unnatural, Christians consider death “far better” than the here and now (see Philippians 1.21-23). At funerals, we often hear how the person that has passed on is “better off” now that he or she has died. This “laying aside” of the body is not the resurrection; apparently it is a disembodied period, something that is temporary (see Revelation 6.9; 20.4, 6). With optimism, Paul looks forward to this time. This is because he desires “to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (Philippians 1.23). Paul sees victory beyond the grave.

But this presence with Christ after death (e.g., in Paradise; see Luke 23.43) is not the *best* experience. In 2 Corinthians 5.1-10, Paul recognizes these three levels of life—the good, the better, and the best. He writes:

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Good—"In this tent, we groan, being burdened." "While we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord." Better—"We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord." Best—"We have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." "Not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life."

Best is life in the resurrection. We will receive glorified, imperishable, immortal bodies (1 Corinthians 15.35-49). This body, sown as seed in death, will by the power of God spring forth in new life. The spirit will be adorned with a resurrected body. This is the redemption of the body. We will be made like Jesus in the glory of his coming. John tells us, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" (1 John 3.2-3).

The implications for this is that balance is needed. We live in the here and now, in our bodies and in our spirits. But this life is only for a short time, yet we must be responsible. Even now, however, our desire is to be with the Lord, to long for the day when we will "know him and the power of his resurrection" (Philippians 3.10). The ancient Christian prayer, "Our Lord, come" (from Aramaic *Maranatha*; 1 Corinthians 16.22), expresses both the desire to be with Christ and to avoid "nakedness" (i.e., the spirit without the body). But like the apostle, "whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him" (2 Corinthians 5.9).