

STEWARDSHIP OF THE BODY

One of the great proofs for the existence of a supreme power and intelligence is the design that is aparent everywhere in the natural world. Design and planning are apparent in the planetary bodies, in the animal creation, and in every leaf and tree and blade of grass. But nowhere is there greater evidence of intelligent creation than in the human body. With its two hundred bones, its five hundred muscles, and its thousand ligaments to bind them together, the human body is a mechanism of symmetry and co-ordination. Ten thousand arteries, ten thousand veins, ten thousand nerves, and a hundred thousand glands are parts of its intricate makeup. After spending a lifetime in studying the structure and function of one organ, such as the eye, experts of anatomy still confess that there is more to be learned than can be learned in a lifetime. How can men believe that this marvelous human body is the result of the workings of blind chance. . . that it is the culmination of ages of evolution? Design can be the result only of intelligence. The human body presents one of the greatest proofs for the existence of God. Surely, we can agree with the psalmist: "It is he that made us and now we ourselves." (Psalms 100:3). Again, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." (Psalms 139:14).

Throughout the Bible we find evidence that God has shown great concern for and great interest in our physical bodies. He made every provision for man's physical needs, gave laws designed for the preservation of his health, and in many other ways showed his concern for man's physical welfare. There is no inherent value in the human body for it is made of dust. "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground." (Genesis 2:7) "Dust thou art." (Genesis 3:19). Of course, there is more to man than the physical. . . . there is an immortal spirit, and it is this immortal spirit that is in the image of God, but the body came from the ground. . . .and is constituted of the elements of the dust. God's concern for the physical organism is certainly not occasioned by its material value. There must be other reasons.

Writing to the Christians at Corinth, Paul asked: "What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have from God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are Gods." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). The relation therefore, which the Christian sustains to his physical body is that of a steward. He has been entrusted with the property of another, and since stewardship implies accountability, man will

one day stand before God and give an account of the use made of his body while he lived on the earth. He must also give account for the treatment and the attitude he had toward it.

"Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." (1 Corinthians 4:2). What is involved in faithful stewardship of the body? Paul summarized the matter for us when he admonished Christians to "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God." (Romans 12:1). This is a remarkable contrast to the dead animal sacrifices of Judaism. Christians are not to offer the dead bodies of animals but their own living bodies as daily sacrifices to Jehovah.

The Christian should be concerned about his health for it is necessary to his greatest usefulness. The New Testament word which summarizes the duties of the Christian in caring for his body is "temperance" or "self-control." Self-control involves abstinence from every harmful thing. The Christian will not take into his body drugs that are harmful, he will not drink intoxicants, and he will not be a slave to any habit that is harmful to health.

Self-control also involves the proper use of good things. Modern life is geared to a feverish gait and human beings are hurrying through life without regard to the maintenance of health. Jesus once said, "Come ye yourselves apart and rest awhile." (Mark 6:31). This is a call that surely needs to be heeded by the people of our time. The proper amount of work and exercise is important but so is the proper amount of rest and relaxation. There is the tendency on the part of most people to work too much, eat too much, and play too much. Self-control includes moderation in all good and beneficial activities.

Many work feverishly all week, stay out late on Saturday night, just barely arrive in time for worship on the Lord's Day, and are in no condition to worship. They are worn out, their minds are filled with cares and anxieties of this life, and they are not able to worship God in an acceptable manner. Presenting the body to God as a living sacrifice would surely require that one give attention to his physical condition and feeling when he assembles with the saints for worship. It is next to impossible to worship God in Spirit and in truth when the body is half asleep and numb with fatigue. Some thought and preparation on Saturday night would give us greater assurance of a Lord's Day acceptable to God.

The body also is the avenue thorough which the soul makes impressions upon the world about it. It is the instrument for working in this world. "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yeild ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. (Romans 6:12-13). In order for the body to be an instrument of righteousness for God it must be used in his service. We are exhorted to work with our hands that we may have to them to those in need. (Ephesians 4:28). The feet of those who bring the gospel are said to be beautiful. (Romans 10:15). No corrupt communication is to proceed out of our mouth, the tongue is to be used in blessing God, and the fruit of our lips is to be offered up to God as a sacrifice. (Ephesians 4:29, James 3:9, Hebrews 13:15).

While Jesus was on earth he had a work to do, and he accomplished that work through the members of his physical body. "I must work the works of him that sent me." (John 9:4) "A body has thou prepared me." (Hebrews 10:5). The price of human redemption was finally paid by the offering up of his body as a sacrifice for sin. "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Hebrews 10:10). We, too, must do ~~the~~ work of God through the members of our physical bodies, and when we thus use these members we are being faithful stewards of the body God has entrusted to us.

Both Paul and Peter consider the body as a house in which the person dwells, and they speak of being in the body and being out of the body. "Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me." (II Peter 1:14-15). "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened." (II Corinthians 5:4). Again, "Therefore, we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) we are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." (II Corinthians 5:6-8).

The Bible shouts at us of the brevity of life. Life is a vapor, a flower, a blade of grass. The days of our years are threescore and ten or perhaps fourscore. The outward man perishes. Dust returns to dust and the spirit goes to God who gave it. (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Brevity of life does not

characterize the spirit. . . only the body. But even so, death does not cause God's interest in the body to end, for he has promised that he will raise it from the dead unto immortality. "It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; 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." (I Corinthians 15:42-44). "Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." (I Corinthians 15:54). An immortal body in which to spend eternity in the presence of God is the culmination of a life of faithful stewardship.