

Introduction:

Our emphasis on “Practical Christianity” the last two weeks has struck a congregational nerve, in a great way. Our backpacks to the poor have been flying off the shelves and our brand-new clothing ministry is processing donations. Remember what we have been saying all along: Christianity is both wicked smart and insanely practical! Obviously, the intellectuals among us like to gravitate to the “smart” side of this equation while the activists more towards the practical. Both emphases are necessary to keep Christianity theologically strong and relevant in the world of human need and suffering. The issue we will address this morning is profoundly personal and insanely practical. My hope is that when we leave here today, we would be “not only hearers of the Word but practitioners of it” (James 1:22).

A Holistic Faith

I believe the attractiveness of Christianity derives not only from its eternal and transforming truths but also from its holism. If the Trinity is a Three-In-One Being, then we are three-in-one beings as well, in terms of having a body, mind, and spirit. We are the composite and integration of three dimensions which have been designed, created, and redeemed by Jesus Christ. Therefore, every aspect of our three-dimensional self must be continually surrendered to his lordship. So today, we will have a discussion regarding our bodies, i.e., our physicality, or as smarter sounding people like to say, our corporeality (lol).

Thoughts that Diminish the Body

First off, we need to reject any thinking that diminishes our bodies. For instance, an ancient religious/philosophy called Docetism believed our spirit selves are intrinsically good while our material selves are inherently evil (why it rejected Jesus as fully God and fully human).

Hedonism/Paganism also greatly reduces the value of our physicality. The pursuit of pleasure, primarily through sexual activity, is its highest goal. This is one reason why sexualization, and sexual perversion, is a hallmark of decadent and declining societies (Super Bowl half-time show). Let me interject that God has indeed created physical sex for both pleasure and procreation, but only within his moral vision and framework is it most enjoyable and fulfilling (more on this later in the series). Want to know how pagan you are? If someone asked you, “Who owns your body?” how would you respond? There’s your answer.

Hinduism generally teaches that whatever happens to our bodies is inconsequential. Whatever the body endures: good, bad, or ugly, is merely the cause-effect of karma which should never be interfered with. Nirvana (Hindu Heaven) is a place where you, and your body, cease to be forever.

Soma Theology

Christianity stands in stark contrast to such thinking. It neither worships, nor neglects, the body but holds a high view of it. To see just how high, we need to do some “soma” theology this morning (Greek for body). Our bodies were created on the Sixth Day of Creation and declared “good” by God. Psalm 139:13-16 tells us that they are “fearfully and wonderfully made,” because God, in the imagery of the sacred weavings of the Holy of Holies, “knitted” them together the moment we were procreated

in our mother's womb. Because the human body is the pinnacle of God's creative design, Jesus stated in the Great Commandment that we are to "Love God with all of our hearts, minds, soul and strength." "Strength" here refers, in part to our physical bodies. So that people could "Love God with all of their strength," Jesus spent a great deal of his three-year public ministry feeding bodies, healing bodies, and nurturing bodies. If he anticipated that Christianity was only concerned with mind and spirit, he would not have done these things, nor would he have given medical science the incredible wisdom and amazing grace necessary to heal the body. Paul also significantly elevated the extrinsic worth of our physical bodies when calling them "Members of Christ" and "Temples of the Holy Spirit" in which God himself resides (I Corinthians 6:18).

Body Breakdown

Because of sin, however, our bodies, along with the rest of creation, is under the constant state of decay, disease, and death (2 Corinthians 4:16, Romans 8:22). This harsh phenomenon is why Paul also labeled them "Bodies of humiliation" and "Earthly home/tent" (2 Corinthians 5:1). However, the Good News of the Gospel is that God will reverse the "ashes-to-ashes" and "dust-to-dust" curse by recreating each aspect of his creation that has been lost to sin and death. On that day, our bodies will be physically resurrected, like Jesus' was. One of my favorite passages on this promise is Philippians 3:21:

*By the power that enables him to bring everything under his control,
will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

God Owns Our Bodies

Given "soma" theology, it's essential to understand the divine ownership of our bodies and to realize that how we treat them matters a great deal, especially to God. Listen to Romans 12:1:

I urge you, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

This "spiritual act of worship" encouragement reminds us that we are to use our bodies for God's will and, to a lesser degree, care for them as one way to glorify him (I Corinthians 6:20). In this sense, 1Timothy 4:8 is the practical outworking of Romans 12:1:

*Physical exercise is of some value, but godliness has value for all things,
holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.*

Sedentary and Big Caloric Lifestyles

Physical exercise is important, just not as important as spiritual exercise, but crucial, nonetheless. Paul wrote this while living in the physical brutalities of the pre-modern world. We read it while living in the physical comforts of the post-modern one. Pre-modern life may have been harsher, but sedentary life, along with the prevalence of cheap and plentiful food in our world, is not doing our bodies any favors either.

It's incontrovertible the root cause of most of our ill-health or dis-ease is lifestyle and diet-related. The good news is, they are both controllable. The question is will we? As the well-known preacher Chuck

Swindoll put it, “Whether we rust out or burn out, we’re still out, and that’s never God’s will.” Without question, we owe it to God, our loved ones, our church, and even ourselves to engage in a healthy lifestyle. One of the great joys of living in Paradise, I mean Florida, is that it’s truly an active, outdoor state. However, let us be on guard for anything that physically debilitates or addicts, whether it comes from a pack, a plate, a bottle, a needle, or a screen. As the hard lessons of Covid have taught us, it’s extremely challenging to fight off diseases, therefore, let’s do nothing to aid and abet them. Instead, let’s be pro-active with a healthy lifestyle.

Conclusion/Application

One person who was proactive with his health was our denominational fitness guru, John Wesley. Although he traveled over 250,000 miles on horseback, he routinely used a 1700s exercise device called a “Chamber Chair.” To get his heart rate up, he would bounce up and down on it, mimicking the riding of a horse. Believe it or not, it was forerunner to our stationary bikes and treadmills. Wesley was such an advocate of physical fitness he, at 87, wrote this to his niece Sarah:

Be sure to take as much exercise every day as you can bear. I wish you would desire George Whitfield to send you the chamber-chair out of my dining-room, which you should use half an hour at least daily.

Wesley understood, better than most, that physical, emotional, and spiritual health are interconnected. If we want our bodies to help us live a long, Godward, healthy, and productive life, so must we.

Practical Application: Exercise ½ Hour Daily