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“Christ has no body now but yours...”
Theresa of Avila

Honoring the Body as a Spiritual Discipline Biblical and Theological Foundations

Dualism is the belief and the experience of two different elements of human experience being at war with each other. At times we may find ways for these elements to co-exist in an uneasy truce but there is always an underlying (and perhaps very subtle) hostility. The result is a sacred-secular split that is ultimately unhelpful to the spiritual life.

One of the profound dualisms embedded in both Protestant and Catholic tradition is a false separation between the physical world in which we exist as embodied beings and the spiritual world where we believe God and other spirit beings exist. What usually goes along with this separation is a belief that the spiritual realm is somehow higher and better than the physical, material realm. But this is simply not good theology. *All the great themes of Scripture affirm the spiritual significance of our bodies* leaving no doubt that honoring the body as a created good and as the place where the Holy Spirit has chosen to dwell is a central discipline of our Christian faith.

Following is a list of Scripture references which provide biblical perspectives on the body along with a few theological interpretations. These Biblical themes and Scripture passages are provided as a way of helping you embrace more fully the gift of life in your body and guiding you in exploring about how you might become more intentional about honoring your body as one facet of your spiritual practice.

Genesis 1, 2. At creation, God created human beings—men and women in bodies—and declared it very good.

Deuteronomy 30:11-14 affirms the fact that there is a visceral, in-the-body knowing that can lead us to choose life.

Psalms 63. Desire for God is experienced in the flesh as a visceral longing that is like hunger and thirst.

Psalms 139-- the Psalmist affirms and experiences his body and soul together as part of God’s created goodness.

John 1—In the Incarnation, Jesus, the supremely spiritual being who existed far beyond the physical, material world as we know it “became flesh.” This elevates the experience of being ‘in the flesh’ to a whole new level of significance.

Luke 22:14 f. The central sacrament of our faith—the ritual and symbol around which all Christians gather—is bread and wine symbolizing flesh and blood.

I Corinthians 12. The major metaphor for the presence of the living Christ on this earth is the body. We are the Body of Christ—many members but we are all one.

I Corinthians 6:19, 20. Our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit, a place the Holy Spirit has chosen to dwell. A temple is a place of prayer and meeting with God. We are called not glorify the body but to glorify God *in our bodies*.

I Corinthians 15. The resurrection of the body means that the body matters. . We will spend eternity not as disembodied spirits but as glorious embodied beings.

II Corinthians 4:7-12. We carry the treasure of the ministry we have been given in earthen vessels (bodies) so that the power of Christ can be seen in us.

As you explore the practice of honoring the body as a spiritual discipline, allow these Scriptures to ground you in Biblical, theological truth. Make note of other Scriptures that God brings to mind as well. Remember, Christ has no body now but yours. What does it mean for you to glorify God in your body?

*Christ has not body now on earth but yours,
no hands but yours,
no feet but yours.*

*Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion is to look out on the world.
Yours are the feet with which Christ is to go about doing good.
Yours are the hands with which Christ is to bless all people now.*

Thereas of Avila